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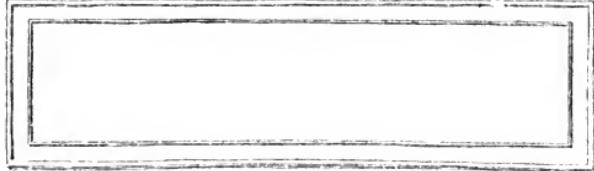
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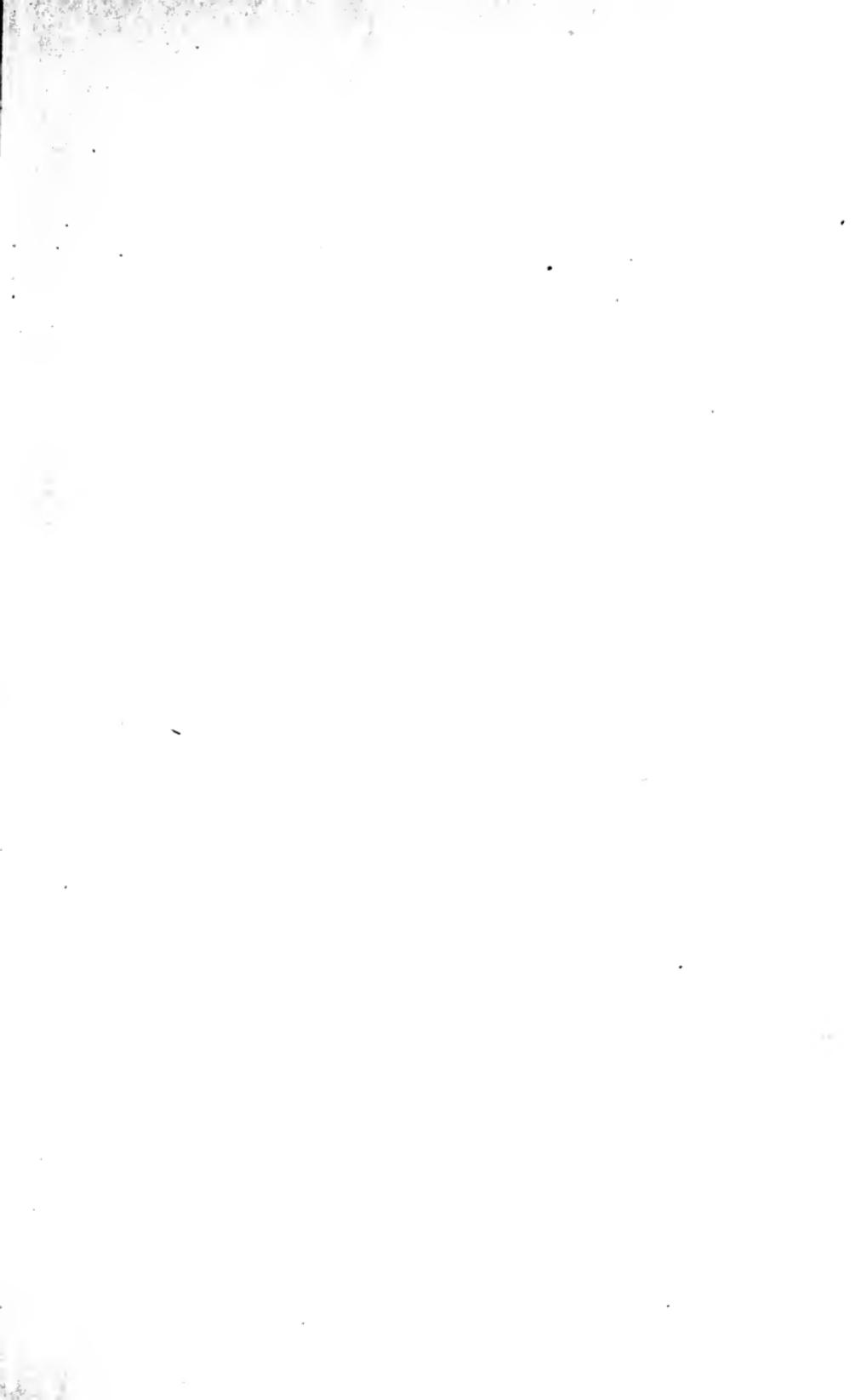


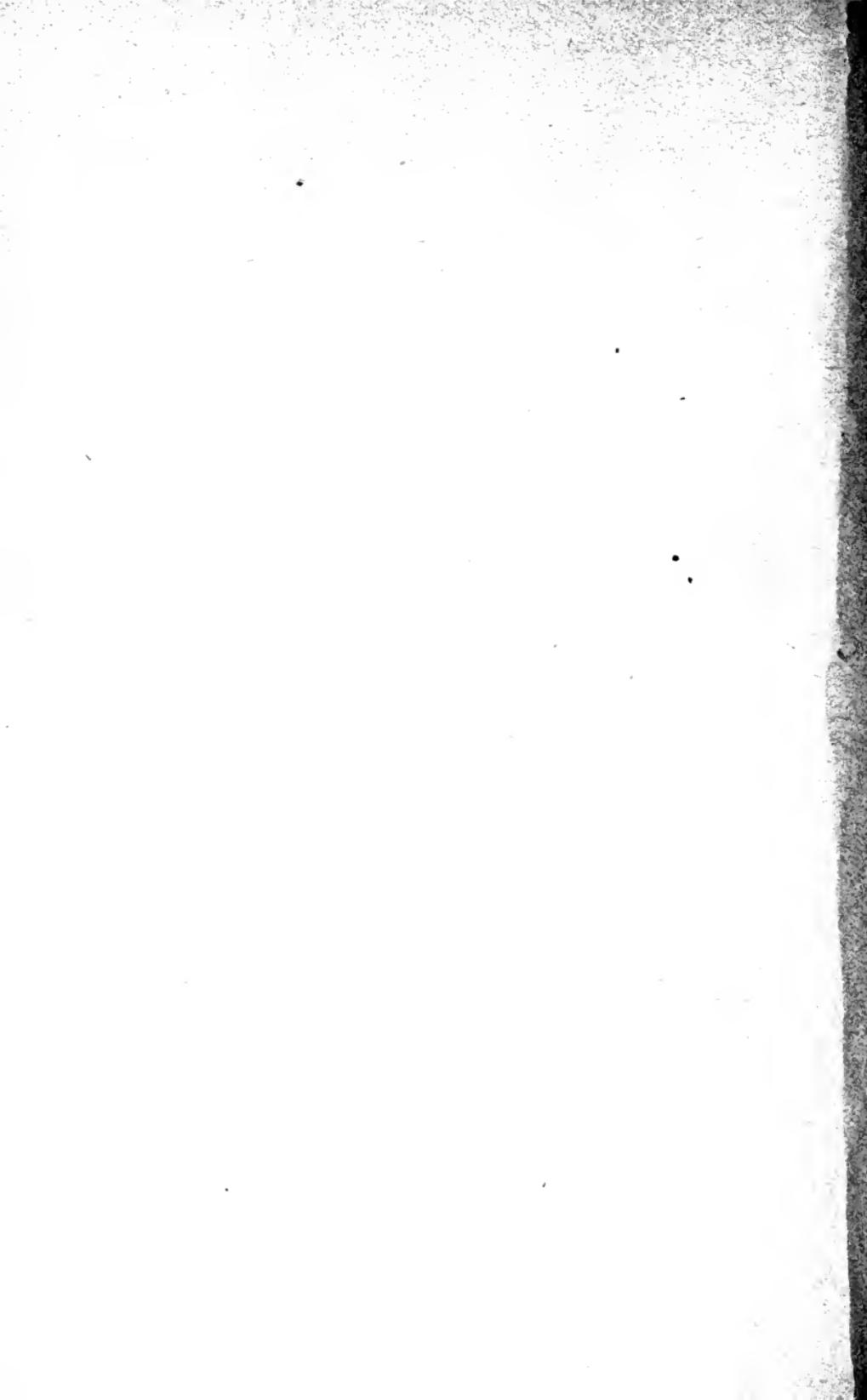
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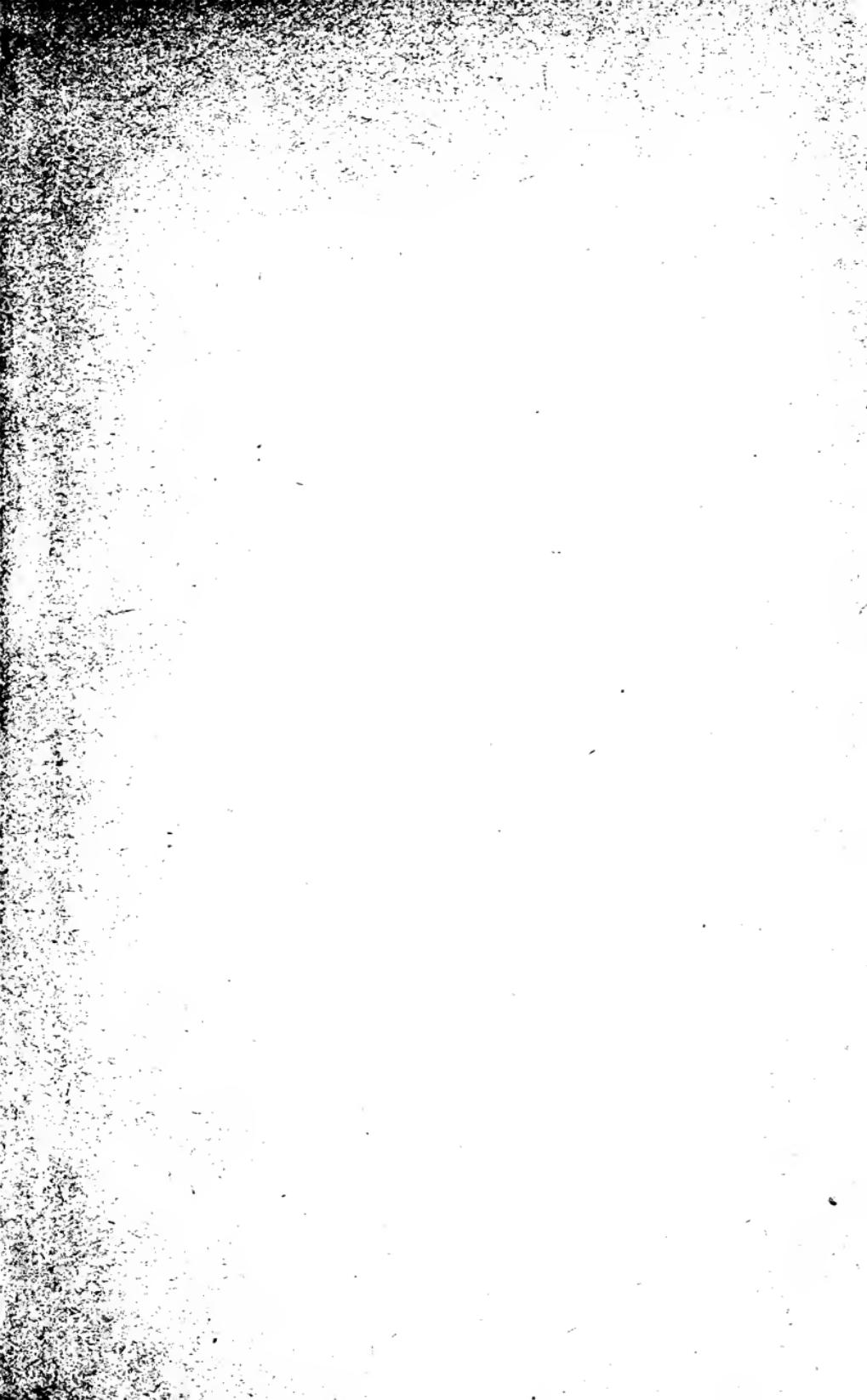
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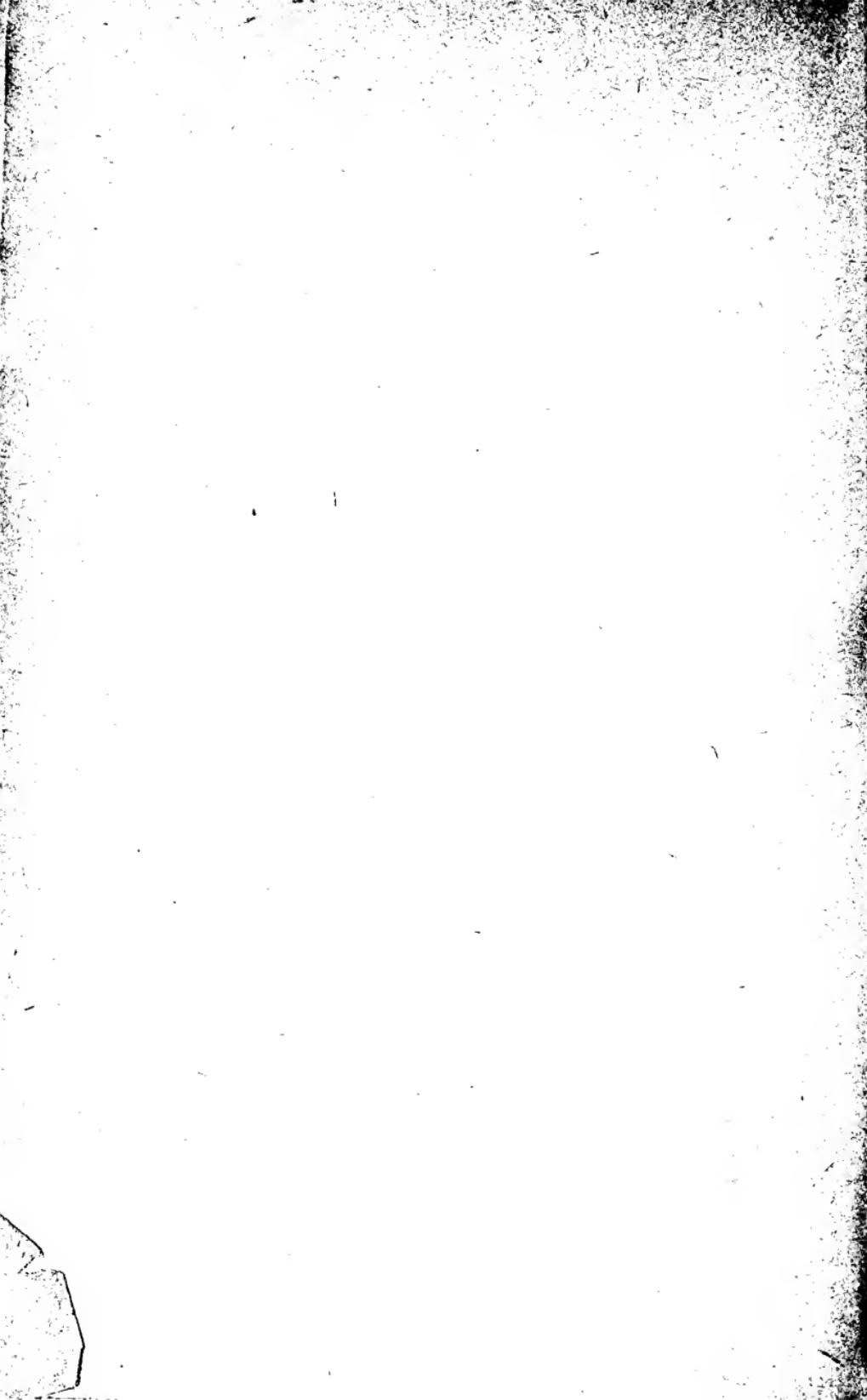
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## THE IRISH ON THE SOMME



# THE IRISH ON THE SOMME

*BEING THE SECOND SERIES OF  
“THE IRISH AT THE FRONT”*

By MICHAEL MACDONAGH  
*Author of “Irish Life and Character”*

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY*  
JOHN REDMOND, M.P.

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MAJOR WILLIAM REDMOND, M.P.  
ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT (IRISH BRIGADE)  
WHO DIED OF WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION  
JUNE 7, 1917  
LEADING HIS MEN IN THE ATTACK  
ON WYTSCHAETE WOOD

## INTRODUCTION

By JOHN REDMOND, M.P.

### THE RESPONSE OF THE IRISH RACE

THIS war is a war of liberation, and its battle-cry is the rights and liberties of humanity. From the very beginning of the conflict my colleagues of the Irish Party, and I myself, have availed of every opportunity in Parliament, on the platform, and in the Press, to present this view of it to the Irish race at home and abroad; and despite the tragic mistakes made in regard to Ireland by the successive Governments which have held office since war broke out, we are still unshaken in our opinion that Ireland's highest interests lie in the speedy and overwhelming victory of England and the Allies.

The response of the Irish race the world over to our appeal to rise in defence of civilisation and freedom has been really wonderful. The example was set by Ireland herself.

At the outbreak of the war I asked the Irish people, and especially the young men of Ireland, to mark the profound change which has been brought about in the relations of Ireland to the Empire by wholeheartedly

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supporting the Allies in the field. I pointed out that at long last, after centuries of misunderstanding, the democracy of Great Britain had finally and irrevocably decided to trust Ireland with self-government; and I called upon Ireland to prove that this concession of liberty would have the same effect in our country as it has had in every other portion of the Empire, and that henceforth Ireland would be a strength instead of a weakness. I further pointed out that the war was provoked by the intolerable military despotism of Germany, that it was a war in defence of small nationalities, and that Ireland would be false to her own history and traditions, as well as to honour, good faith and self-interest, if she did not respond to my appeal.

The answer to that appeal is one of the most astonishing facts in history. At the moment, fraught with the most terrible consequences to the whole Empire, this Kingdom found for the first time in the history of the relations between Great Britain and Ireland that the Irish Nationalist members, representing the overwhelming mass of the people of Ireland, were enabled to declare themselves upon the side of England. They did that with their eyes open. They knew the difficulties in the way. They knew—none so well—the distrust and suspicion of British good faith which had been, in the past, universal almost in Ireland. They recognised that the boon of self-government had not been finally granted to their country. They knew the traditional hostility which existed in many parts of Ireland to recruiting

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for the British Army. Facing all these things, and all the risks that they entailed, they told Ireland and her sons abroad that it was their duty to rally to the support of the Allies in a war which was in defence of the principles of freedom and civilisation. We succeeded far better than we had anticipated, or hoped at the commencement. This is a notorious fact. There is genuine enthusiasm in Ireland on the side of the Allies. Addressing great popular gatherings in every province in Ireland in support of the Allies, I called for a distinctively Irish army, composed of Irishmen, led by Irishmen and trained at home in Ireland. With profound gratitude I acknowledge the magnificent response the country has made. For the first time in the history of the Wars of England there is a huge Irish army in the field. The achievements of that Irish army have covered Ireland with glory before the world, and have thrilled our hearts with pride. North and South have vied with each other in springing to arms, and, please God, the sacrifices they have made side by side on the field of battle will form the surest bond of a united Irish nation in the future.

From Ireland, according to the latest official figures, 173,772 Irishmen are serving in the Navy and Army, representing all classes and creeds amongst our people. Careful inquiries made through the churches in the north of England and Scotland and from other sources, show that, in addition, at least 150,000 sons of the Irish race, most of them born in Ireland, have joined the Colours in Great Britain. It is a pathetic circumstance that these Irishmen in non-Irish regiments

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are almost forgotten, except when their names appear in the casualty lists. Some of the Irish papers have, for a considerable time past, been publishing special lists of killed and wounded under the heading, "Irish Casualties in British Regiments." One of these daily lists, taken quite haphazard, and published on November 1, 1916, contains 225 names, all distinctively Irish—O'Briens, O'Hanlons, Donovans, etc. These men were scattered amongst the following non-Irish regiments—

- Grenadier Guards.
- Coldstream Guards.
- Scots Guards.
- Welsh Guards.
- Royal Field Artillery.
- Royal Engineers.
- Royal Scots Fusiliers.
- The Black Watch.
- Northumberland Fusiliers.
- Yorkshire Regiment.
- East Yorks Regiment.
- Dorsetshire Regiment.
- Cheshire Regiment.
- York and Lancaster Regiment.
- Lancashire Fusiliers.
- King's Royal Rifles.
- London Regiment.
- Manchester Regiment.
- King's Liverpool Regiment.
- Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.

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- Royal Warwickshire Regiment.
- Highland Light Infantry.
- Leicestershire Regiment.
- Worcestershire Regiment.
- Sherwood Foresters.
- King's Own Yorks Light Infantry.
- Border Regiment.
- Durham Light Infantry.
- Notts. & Derby Regiment.
- Machine Gun Corps.
- Army Service Corps.
- Army Cyclist Corps.

As showing the extent to which Scottish regiments at the Front are made up of Irishmen, one newspaper quotes four hundred names from the casualty lists issued on four successive days one week. All the names are Irish, all the addresses are Scotch, and in only about twenty cases were the men enrolled in Irish regiments, all the others being attached to Scottish regiments. These sad records show the many thousands of Irishmen serving in non-Irish regiments who are never taken into account to the credit of Ireland, in estimating the part she is playing in this war, until they come to light in the casualty lists.

In addition to these voluntary contributions of Ireland and her sons in Great Britain to the British Army, I am informed on the highest authority that from twenty to twenty-five per cent. of all the troops from the oversea Dominions are men of Irish blood. General Botha sent me this cablegram from South

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Africa: "I entirely endorse your view that this victory"—he is referring to his great defeat of the Germans in their colonies—"is the fruit of the policy of liberty and the recognition of national rights in this part of the Empire." General Botha had enormous difficulties to face, serious racial animosity, and bitter national memories. Does any fair-minded man think that General Botha could have overcome those difficulties as he did if the war had broken out just after the recognition of those national rights to which he referred and before they had come into operation? The national rights of Ireland are recognised, but they have not yet come into operation. Yet it is true to say that the overwhelming sentiment of the Irish people is with the Empire for the first time. That fact is of incalculable value. Its influence has spread to every corner of the Empire. If the sentiment of the Irish people at home had not been with England in this war, the depressing and benumbing effect would have been felt everywhere in the self-governing Dominions. Ireland herself has made a splendid response, and the result has been that a wave of enthusiasm has stirred the hearts of men of Irish blood throughout the Empire. I received a New Year's card from the commanding officer and the other officers of a regiment raised in Vancouver, commanded by Irishmen and composed of Irishmen. They call themselves "The Vancouver Irish Fusiliers." Then, not long since, in Cape Town, green flags were presented by General Botha's wife—a member of the historic Emmet family—to an Irish regiment raised

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there. These facts constitute a striking result of the action we felt it our duty to take to bring feeling in Ireland in regard to the war into line with that of the rest of the Empire. Then there is that remarkable Irish battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the Irish Canadian Rangers, which is composed of Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants in equal numbers, commanded by officers more than half of whom are Catholics and having a Catholic chaplain and a Protestant chaplain. This battalion, unique among the fighting units raised at home or abroad during the war, and a magnificent body of men, made a tour through the ancient motherland of their race in January 1917 (on their way to the Front), and received in Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick the most enthusiastic popular welcomes.

Ireland is very proud of these sons of the Irish race who, in every part of the Empire, have followed the lead which she herself has given in rallying to the cause with which she has always sympathised and has always supported—the cause of right against might. The Irish race is represented in this war by at least half a million of men who have voluntarily joined the Colours. How gallantly they have fought this book, in part, relates. In his first series of *The Irish at the Front* Mr. MacDonagh deals with the achievements of the Irish Guards and the Regular Irish regiments of the Line in Flanders and France in the earlier years of the war; the landing of the Munsters and Dublins of the immortal 29th Division at Beach V, Gallipoli; and the fighting of the 10th (Irish)

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Division of the New Armies at Suvla Bay. The story of these glorious deeds sent a wave of emotion through the land. The King, addressing a battalion of the Irish Guards on St. Patrick's Day, 1916, said—

"On St. Patrick's Day, when Irishmen the world over unite to celebrate the memory of their Patron Saint, it gives me great pleasure to inspect the reserve battalion of my Irish Guards, and to testify my appreciation of the services rendered by the regiment in this war. . . . I gratefully remember the heroic endurance of the 1st Battalion in the arduous retreat from Mons, again at Ypres on the critical November 1st, when, as Lord Cavan, your Brigadier, wrote, those who were left showed the enemy that Irish Guards must be reckoned with, however hard hit. After twenty-eight days of incessant fighting against heavy odds, the battalion came out of the line less than a company strong, with only four officers—a glorious tribute to Irish loyalty and endurance. . . . In conferring the Victoria Cross on Lance-Corporal, now Lieutenant, Michael O'Leary, the first Irish Guardsman to win this coveted distinction, I was proud to honour a deed that, in its fearless contempt of death, illustrates the spirit of my Irish Guards. At Loos the 2nd Battalion received its baptism of fire and confirmed the high reputation already won by the 1st Battalion."

*The Daily Telegraph* (London), writing on March 18, 1916, said—

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"There is one key to the soul of Ireland—the word 'freedom.' It was realised instantly that this was no dynastic war on the part of the Allies, no struggle for material ends, but a life and death conflict for liberty of thought and action. Once the issue was exposed, Irishmen, with all the white heat which injustice inspires in their breasts, threw themselves into the battle. The enemy has since felt Irish steel and fallen under Irish bullets. Whatever the future may have in store, the British people will never forget the generous blood of the sister nation, which has been shed on so many hard-fought battlefields since the world-war began."

In this, the second series of *The Irish at the Front*, the thrilling story is continued. The Irish troops dealt with are all of the New Armies—the Ulster Division, the Irish Division and the Tyneside Irish Brigade. I am as proud of the Ulster regiments as I am of the Nationalist regiments. I do not want to boast of their valour. We Irishmen are inclined to take it as a matter of course. These Irish regiments, Unionist and Nationalist, merely keep up the tradition of our race. But I say that Lord Kitchener's words remain true—the words that he wrote to the Viceregal Recruiting Conference in Dublin in 1915, when he said that in the matter of recruiting, "Ireland's performance has been magnificent." Let me ask any fair-minded man this question : If five years ago any one had predicted that in a great war in which the Empire was engaged 173,772 men would

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have been raised from Ireland, and that there would be more than half a million Irishmen with the Colours, would he not have been looked upon as a lunatic? It is the free offering of Ireland. Surely it must be regarded as a proud and astonishing record!

J. E. REDMOND.

## PREFACE

THIS narrative is concerned chiefly with the three distinctively Irish units of the New Armies engaged on the Western Front—the Ulster Division, the Irish Division (representative of the south and west), and the “Tyneside Irish,” in which Irishmen living in the north of England enlisted. It also deals incidentally with the Irish Regular regiments of the Line, and with that numerous body of Irishmen serving in English, Scottish and Welsh battalions and in the Anzacs and Canadians.

The first series of *The Irish at the Front* covers, first, the fighting of the Irish regiments of the Regular Army in France, Flanders and the Dardanelles during the early stages of the war; and, secondly, the operations of the 10th (Irish) Division—composed entirely of “Kitchener’s men”—against the Turks at Gallipoli. The latter, an exceptionally fine body of young Irishmen, gallantly fought and fell—as the story discloses—in that expedition, so ill-fated and yet so romantic, though they had never handled a rifle or done a day’s drill before the war. In this series we see Irishmen of the same type matched against the Germans in France. As we know, Germany confidently expected that such levies, hastily raised and insufficiently trained, would break in pieces at the first encounter

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with her seasoned troops. But it was the formidable German lines that were broken, and they were broken by these very raw levies at the bayonet's point.

For the telling of the Irish part in the story of the Somme I am much indebted to the assistance given by officers and men of the Irish battalions engaged in that mighty battle. But the Irish soldiers are not only "splendid fighting material"—a rather non-human phrase now much in vogue, as if the only thing that matters in warfare is the physical capacity of man—they have souls and minds and hearts, as well as strong right hands, and of these also something is said in this book.

MICHAEL MACDONAGH.

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## CHAPTER I

### IN THE TRENCHES WITH THE CONNAUGHT RANGERS

#### SCENES COMIC AND TRAGIC

"THE men are as anxious for the road, sir, as if 'twere to Galway races they were going, no less, or to Ballinasloe Fair," said the company sergeant-major to the captain. Those referred to belonged to a battalion of the Connaught Rangers ordered to the firing-trenches for the first time. "The real thing at last;" "The genuine McCoy, and no mistake," they said to one another as, in preparation for the march, they hurriedly packed their things in the barns and cow-sheds that served as billets, and, to provide further vent for their jubilation, danced Irish jigs and reels and sang national songs.

These Irishmen had read a lot about the fighting, and had heard a great deal more, but they felt that print and talk, however graphic and copious, left many strange things to be disclosed by the actual experience. Some of them would "get the beck"—the call from Death—but what matter? Were not soldiers who died in action to be envied, rather than pitied, by those who found themselves alive when the war was over, and had not been to the mysterious Front at all? So they thought and said, and now that they were on the road there was a look of proud elation on their faces, as though they had been singled out by special

favour for a grand adventure. They did not regard themselves in the least as heroes, these entirely unsophisticated men, without a trace of self-consciousness. They had volunteered for service in the belief that Ireland would be false to her historical self if she did not take part in this war for freedom, democracy and humanity. But now there was nothing in their minds about revenging the wrongs of Belgium, or driving the invader from the soil of France, or even of saving the British Empire. It was the fight that was the thing. It was the chance of having a smack at "the Gerrys"—as the enemy is called by the Irish soldiers—that they prized. More exalted feelings would come again when the battle was over and won. Then, and not till then, as they return with many gaps in their ranks, do Irish troops see themselves as an army of redemption and deliverance; and the only land they think of having saved is Ireland. To them Ireland personifies all the great causes of the war, and a blow struck for these causes, no matter where, is a blow struck for her.

By the light of many stars sparkling in the sky that dark October night the men could see signs that battles had been fought in the country they were traversing. It was a devastated bare expanse, stretching for miles and miles, very muddy and broken up with shell holes. Roads had been made across it, and along one of these the battalion went in the wake of the guides with swinging lanterns. The men were fully loaded. In addition to his fighting equipment, almost every one carried something extra, such as a pick or shovel, a bag of rations, or a bundle of fire-wood. The company officers also had heavy packs strapped on their shoulders. Great good-humour prevailed. Whenever, at awkward turns of the road, or at very dark points, progress was interrupted, those in front would shout some preposterous explanation

of the delay to their comrades behind. "Begonnies, boys, we're taking tickets here for Galway. Word has come down that the war is over," cried one joker. Deep groans of pretended dismay and disappointment rose from the rear ranks. "And poor me, without a German helmet, or even a black eye, to show that I was in it," was one of the responses.

When the open plain was quitted the battalion disappeared into a trench like a narrow country lane winding between high banks. It was much darker in these deeps than it had been outside. The gloom was broken occasionally by the light of lanterns carried by sentinels, or electric torches at junctions where several trenches crossed. Soon the trench became narrower and more tortuous. It also became more soaked with rain. Pools of water were frequently encountered. The battalion was now a floundering, staggering, overloaded and perspiring closely packed mass of men, walking in couples or in single file and treading on each other's heels.

The mishaps arising from this crowded scramble in the dark through mud and mire, between banks of unsupported crumbling earth, did not exhaust the Irish cheerfulness of the battalion. There was laughter when a man got a crack on the skull from a rifle which a comrade carried swung across his shoulder. There was louder laughter still when another, stooping to pick up something he had dropped, was bumped into from behind and sent sprawling. So sucking and tenacious was the mud that frequently each dragging footstep called for quite a physical effort, and a man was thankful that he did not have to leave a boot behind. "Ah, sure this is nothin' to the bog away in Connemara, where I often sunk up to me neck when crossing it to cut turf," was the comfort imparted in a soft brogue. "True for you, Tim," remarked another. "It's an ould sayin'

and a true one that there's nothin' so bad but it could be worse."

The trench certainly proved the truth of the saying. Bad as it had been, it sank to a still lower degree of slush. There were deep holes filled with water into which the men went with an abrupt plunge and passed through with much splashing. Just ahead of one of these particularly treacherous points singing was heard. The chorus was taken up by many voices, and its last line was rapped out with hearty boisterousness—

"Out and make way for the bould Fenian Men."

This joyous noise heralded the appearance of a party of the Dublin Fusiliers, belonging to the same Division, who were coming down the trench. By the light of lanterns and lamps it was seen that they had taken off their trousers and socks and, holding up their shirts, were wading in their boots blithely through the pools, like girls in bare legs and lifted petticoats paddling at the seaside.

The Connaught men laughed hilariously. "Sure the Dublin jackeens have never been beaten yet for cuteness," they cried. "They stripped to their pelts so as they wouldn't get the 'fluensy by means of their wet clothes. And, faix, 'twould be the greatest pity in the world anything would ail stout and hearty boys like them." As they spoke, the men of the west lay close against the embankments to let the men of the east go by. But weren't the Dublins in the devil of a hurry back to billets? the Rangers went on to remark. And why not? answered the Dublins. Sure if they'd only sniff with their noses they would smell the roast beef and the steaming punch that were being got ready for them by special orders of Field-Marshal Haig for the great things they did away

up in the firing-line. "Lucky boys!" shouted the Rangers, responding to the joke. "And tell us now, have ye left us a Gerry at all alive to get a pelt at, and we new at the game?" A Dublin man gave the reply as he went past. "To tell ye the truth, except there's a raid, there isn't much divarshion in the way of fighting; but every man of ye will have his full and plenty of mud and water before he's much oulder." "Well, there's nothing in that to yowl about." "Maybe not, if you can swim." The trench resounded with laughter at the exchange of banter. But for fear any of the Rangers might take some of the talk as half a joke and whole earnest, a kind-hearted sergeant of the Dublins, wishful to say the cheery word, called out, "Don't mind them playboys; there's no more water and mud in it than is natural in such wet weather as we're getting."

The Rangers reached their destination just as the day was dawning in a cold drizzle from a grey, lowering sky. They were all plastered with yellowish mud. Mud was on their hands, on their faces, in their hair, down their backs; and the barrels of their rifles were choked with mud. For the next four days and nights of duty in the trenches they were to be lapped about with mud. War was to be for them a mixture of mud and high explosives. Of the two mud was the ugliest and most hateful. Soon they would come to think that there was hardly anything left in the world but mud; and from that they would advance to a state of mind in which they doubted whether there ever had been a time in their existence when they were free from mud. But through it all this battalion, like the others in the Division, preserved their good-humour. They are known, in fact, as "The Light-Hearted Brigade." Every difficulty was met with a will to overcome it, tempered with a joke and a laugh. No matter how encrusted with

filth their bodies might be, their souls were always above contamination.

Men ~~at~~ night slept in shelter pits dug deep into the soil ~~at~~ side of the trenches. It was over-crowded in stark violation of all the sanitary by-laws relating to ventilation in civil life. No time was wasted in undressing. The men lay down fully clad in their mud-crusted clothes, even to their boots, wrapped round in blankets. During the night they were awakened by a loud explosion. "All right, boys; don't stir," cried the sergeant. "It's only one of those chape German alarum clocks going off at the wrong time. Get off to sleep again, me heroes." In the morning more time was saved by getting up fully dressed, and not having to wash or to shave, so as to spare the water. A private, looking round the dug-out and noticing the absence of windows, remarked, "Faix, those of us who are glaziers and window-cleaners will find it hard to make a living in this country."

As the battalion was new to the trenches, another Irish battalion of more experience shared with them the holding of this particular line. To a group of lads gathered about a brazier of glowing coke in a sheltered traverse an old sergeant that had seen service in the Regular Army was giving what, no doubt, he thought was sound and valuable advice, but which was at times of a quality calculated more to disturb, perhaps, than to reassure.

"Bullets are nothin' at all," said he. "I wouldn't give you a snap of me fingers for them. Listen to them now, flyin' about and whinin' and whimperin' as if they wor lost, stolen or strayed, and wor lookin' for a billet to rest in. They differ greatly, do these bullets; but sure in time you'll larn them all by sound and be able to tell the humour each one of them is in. There's only one kind of bullet, boys, that you'll

never hear; and that is the one which gives you such a pelt as to send you home to Ireland or to kingdom come. But," he continued, "what . . . . . ar of God into your souls, if it isn't there already, is the heavy metal which the Gerrys pitch across to us in exchange for ours. The first time I was up here I was beside a man whose teeth went chatterin' in a way that put me in fear of me life. Sure, didn't I think for a minute it was a Gerry machine-gun—may the devil cripple them!—startin' its bloody work at me ear. Now, there must be none of that in this trench. If you're afraid, don't show it; remiber always that the Gerrys are in just as great a fright, ^ not more so. Show your spunk. Stand fast or sit tig^ and hope for the best. Above all, clinch your teeth.

The bombardment of a trench by shells from guns in the rear of the enemy's lines, or by bombs thrown from mortars close at hand, is probably the greatest test of endurance that has ever been set to humanity. The devastating effect is terrific. At each explosion men may be blown to pieces or buried alive. Even the concussion often kills. A man might escape being hit by the flying projectiles and yet be blinded or made deaf or deprived of his speech by the shock. All feel as if their insides had collapsed. The suspense of waiting for the next shell or bomb, the uncertainty as to where it is going to fall, followed by the shake which the detonation gives the nervous system, are enough to wear out the most stout-hearted of soldiers. It is then that companionship and discipline tell. The men catch from one another the won't-appear-frightened determination, and the spirit of won't-give-in.

Crash! A fierce gust of wind sweeps through the trench. Men are lifted from their feet and flung violently to the ground amid showers of earth and stones. There is a brief pause; and then is heard the most unexpected of sounds—not the moaning of

pain, but a burst of laughter! Four men of the battalion were playing "Forty-five," a card game beloved of Hibernians, seated under a piece of tarpaulin propped up on poles, as much at their ease as if they lay under a hedge on a Sunday evening in summer at home in Ireland, with only the priest to fear, and he known to be on a sick call at the other side of the parish. The bomb came at the most inopportune moment, just as the fall of the trick was about to be decided. When the card party recovered their senses, the man who held the winning card was found to be wounded. "'Twas the Gerrys—sweet bad luck to them!—that jinked the game that time, boys," he exclaimed. His companions, standing round him, burst into laughter at the remark.

Merriment is not uncommon as the shells are bursting. The spectacle of four or five men hurriedly tumbling for shelter into the same "funk hole," a wild whirl of arms and legs, has its absurd side and never fails to excite amusement. The way in which men disentangle themselves from the ruins caused by the explosion is often also grotesque. Racy oddities of character are revealed. One man was buried in the loose earth. His comrades hastened to rescue him, and to cheer him up told him he would be got out next to no time, for Tim Maloney, the biggest as well as the fastest digger in the company was engaged on the job. "I feel that right well," cried the victim, as he spluttered the mud from his mouth. "But I've enough on top of me without him! Pull me out of this from under his feet." There was an explosion close to a man at work repairing the trench. The man was overheard saying to himself, as he turned his back disdainfully to the shell, "Oh, go to blazes, with yez."

But it is not all comedy and farce. How could it be with stern, black-visaged Death always watching

with wolfish eyes to see men die? Fate plays unimaginable tricks with its victims. A bullet stops many a casual conversation for ever. "Look at this!" cries a man, holding up his cap for a comrade to see the bullet-hole that had just been made through it. "A close shave," he adds; "but what matter? Isn't a miss as good as a mile?" And, as he was putting the cap on again, he fell a corpse to a surer bullet. There he lay, just a bundle of muddy khaki; and a dozing comrade, upon whom he dropped, elbowed him aside, saying impatiently, "Get out of that, with yer andrew-martins" (jokes and tricks); "can't you let a poor divil get a wink of sleep?" Tragedy takes on, at times, queer, fantastic shapes. A man has his right arm blown off close to the shoulder. He picks the limb up with his left hand, shouting, "My arm! my arm! Oh, holy mother of God, where's my arm?" In raging agony he rushes shrieking down the trench carrying the limb with him until he encounters his company officer. "Oh, captain, darlin'," he cries. "Look what the Gerrys have done to me! May God's curse light upon them and theirs for ever! An' now I'll never shoulder a rifle for poor ould Ireland any more."

The night, and only the night, has terrors for the Irish soldiers, especially those from the misty mountains and remote seaboard of the west and south. In the daylight they are merry and prolific of jest. Strongly gregarious by instinct, they delight in companionship. They are sustained and upheld by the excitement of battle's uproar. They will face any danger in the broad daylight. But they hate to be alone in the dark anywhere, and are afraid to pass at night even a graveyard in which their own beloved kith and kin lie peacefully at rest for ever. They feel "lonesome and queer" as they would say themselves.

So it is that when by himself at a listening post in a shell hole in No Man's Land, lapped about with intense blackness, peering and hearkening, the superstitious soul of the Irish soldier seems to conjure up all the departed spectral bogies and terrors of the Dark Ages. He is ready to cry out like Ajax, the Greek warrior, in "Homer," "Give us but light, O Jove; and in the light, if thou seest fit, destroy us."

Even a Cockney soldier, lacking as he is in any subtle sympathy with the emotional and immaterial sides of life, confesses that it gives him the creeps proper to be out there in the open jaws of darkness, away from his mates and almost right under the nose of old Boche. An Irish soldier will admit that on this duty he does have a genuine feeling of terror. Crouching in the soft, yielding earth, he imagines he is in the grave, watching and waiting he knows not for what. Everything is indefinite and uncertain. There is a vague presentiment that some unknown but awful evil is impending. Perhaps a thousand hostile German eyes are staring at him through the darkness along rifle barrels; or, more horrible still, perhaps a thousand invisible devils are on the prowl to drag his soul to hell. The supernatural powers are the only forces the Irish soldier fears.

The senses of the sentry are so abnormally alert that if grass were growing near him he had only to put his ear to the ground to hear the stirring of the sap. But though he listens intently, not a sound comes out of the blackness. He regards the profound stillness as confirmation of his worst fears. All is silence in the trench behind him, where his comrades ought to be. He would welcome the relief of voices and the sound of feet in the enemy's lines. But the Gerrys give no sign of life. Is he alone in the whole wide world, the solitary survivor of this terrible war? What would he not part with to be able to get up and

run ! But he is fixed to his post by a sense of duty, just as strong as if he were chained there by iron bands. To cry out would afford immense relief to his overwrought feelings. But his tongue seems paralysed in his mouth. Then he bethinks him of his prayers. From his inside tunic pocket he takes out his beads—which his mother gave him at parting and made him promise faithfully always to carry about his person—and, making the sign of the cross, he is soon absorbed in the saying of the Rosary. Resignation and fortitude came to his aid. The invisible evil agencies by which he had really been encompassed—loneliness, anxiety, melancholy—are dispelled.

Scouting is the night work that appeals most to the Irish soldiers. There is in it the excitement of movement, the element of adventure and the support of companionship, too, for four, five or six go out together. Oh, the fearful joy of crawling on one's stomach across the intervening ground, seeking for a passage through the enemy's wire entanglements or wriggling under it, taking a peep over their parapets, dropping down into a sparsely occupied part of the trench, braining the sentry and returning with rifle and cap as trophies ! This is one of the most perilous forms of the harassing tactics of war, and for its success uncommon pluck and resource are required. Yet, like everything else at the Front, it often has an absurd side. A Connaught Ranger, back from such an expedition, related that, hearing the Gerrys talking, he called out, "How many of ye are there?" To his surprise he got an answer in English : "Four." Then, throwing in a bomb, he said, "Divide that between ye, an' be damned to ye." "Faix, 'twas the bomb that divided them," he added. "for didn't they come out of the trench after me in smithereens." Another party returned from a raid with tears streaming down their cheeks. "Is it bad

news ye bring, crying in that way ? " they were asked. No ! they hadn't bad news ; nor were they crying. If it was crying they were, wouldn't they be roaring and bawling ? and there wasn't a sound out of them for any one to hear. Only asses could say such a thing as that. 'Twas they that looked like silly asses, they were told, with the tears pouring out of their eyes like the Powerscourt waterfall. What the mischief was the matter with them, anyway ? Well, then, if any one cared to know, was the reply, 'twas the Gerrys that treated them to a whiff of lachrymose gas !

The fatigue, the disgust, and the danger of life in the trenches are, at times, stronger than any other impulse, whether of the flesh or of the soul. "'Tis enough to drive one to the drink : a grand complaint when there's plenty of porter about," said a private ; "but a terrible fate when there's only the water we're wading in, and that same full up—the Lord save us !—of creeping and wriggling things." "True for you ; it's the quare life, and no mistake," remarked another. "You do things and get praise for them, such as smashing a fellow's skull, or putting a bullet through him, which if you were to do at home you'd be soon on the run, with a hue and cry and all the police of the country at your heels."

Back in billets again, for a wash and a shave and a brush up, and lying in their straw beds in the barns, the Rangers would thus philosophise on their life. The bestial side of it—the terrible overcrowding of the men, the muck, the vermin, the gobbling of food with filthy hands, the stench of corrupting bodies lying in the open, or insufficiently buried, and, along with all that, its terror, agony and tragedy are, indeed, utterly repellent to human nature. Still, there was general agreement that they had never spent a week of such strange and exquisite experiences. Fear there was at

times, but it seemed rather to keep up a state of pleasurable emotion than to generate anguish and distress. Certainly most Connaught Rangers will swear that life in the trenches has at least three thrilling and exalting moments. One is when the tot of rum is served round. Another is the first faint appearance of light in the sky behind the enemy's lines, proclaiming that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. The third is the call to "stand to," telling that a visit from the Gerrys is expected, when the men cease to be navvies and become soldiers again—throwing aside the hateful pick and shovel and taking up the beloved rifle and bayonet.

## CHAPTER II

### EXPLOITS OF THE ULSTER DIVISION

#### BELFAST'S TRIBUTE TO THE DEAD

"I am not an Ulsterman, but as I followed the amazing attack of the Ulster Division on July 1, I felt that I would rather be an Ulsterman than anything else in the world. With shouts of 'Remember the Boyne' and 'No Surrender, boys,' they threw themselves at the Germans, and before they could be restrained had penetrated to the enemy fifth line. The attack was one of the greatest revelations of human courage and endurance known in history."—A British officer on the exploits of the Ulster Division, July 1, 1916.

ONE of the most striking and impressive tributes ever paid to the heroic dead was that of Belfast on the 12th of July, 1916, in memory of the men of the Ulster Division who fell on the opening day of that month in the great British offensive on the Somme. For five minutes following the hour of noon all work and movement, business and household, were entirely suspended. In the flax mills, the linen factories, the ship yards, the munition workshops, men and women paused in their labours. All machinery was stopped, and the huge hammers became silent. In shop and office business ceased; at home the housewife interrupted her round of duties; in the streets traffic was brought to a halt, on the local railways the running trains pulled up. The whole population stood still, and in deep silence, with bowed heads but with uplifted hearts, turned their thoughts to the valleys and

slopes of Picardy, where on July 1 the young men of Ulster, the pride and flower of the province, gave their lives for the preservation of the British Empire, the existence of separate and independent States, and the rule of law and justice in their international relations.

"The Twelfth" is the great festival of Belfast. On that day is celebrated the Williamite victories of the Boyne, July 1, and Aughrim, July 12, 1690, in which the cause of the Stuarts went down for ever. It is kept as a general holiday of rejoicing and merrymaking. The members of the Orange lodges turn out with their dazzling banners and their no less gorgeous yellow, crimson and blue regalia; and the streets resound with the lilt of fifes, the piercing notes of cornets, the boom and rattle of many drums, the tramp of marching feet and the cheers of innumerable spectators. There was no such demonstration on July 12, 1916. For the first time in the history of the Orange Institution the observance of the anniversary was voluntarily abandoned, so that there might be no stoppage of war work in the ship yards and munition factories. But at the happy suggestion of the Lord Mayor (Sir Crawford McCullagh), five minutes of the day were given reverently to lofty sorrow for the dead, who, by adding "The Ancre," "Beaumont Hamel" and "Thiepval Wood" to "Derry," "Enniskillen," "The Boyne" and "Aughrim" on the banners of Ulster, have given a new meaning and glory to the celebration of "The Twelfth" in which all Ireland can share. Major-General O. S. W. Nugent, D.S.O., commanding the Ulster Division, in a special Order of the Day, issued after the advance, wrote—

"Nothing finer has been done in the War.

"The Division has been highly tried and has emerged from the ordeal with unstained honour, having fulfilled in every part the great expectations formed of it.

"None but troops of the best quality could have faced the

fire which was brought to bear on them, and the losses suffered during the advance.

"A magnificent example of sublime courage and discipline."

This glory was gained at a heavy cost. There was cause for bitter grief as well as the thrill of pride in Ulster. Nothing has brought home more poignantly to the inhabitants of a small area of the kingdom the grim sacrifices and the unutterable pathos of the war than the many pages of names and addresses of the dead and wounded—relatives, friends and acquaintances—which appeared in the Belfast newspapers for days before "The Twelfth" and after. So blinds were drawn in business and private houses; flags were flown at half-mast; and bells were mournfully tolling for Ulster's irremediable losses when, at the stroke of twelve o'clock, traffic came instantaneously to a standstill, and for five minutes the citizens solemnly stood with bared heads in the teeming rain thinking of the gallant dead, the darkened homes and the inconsolable mothers and wives.

The Ulster Division possesses an individuality all its own. It has no like or equal among the units of the British Army on account of its family character; the close and intimate blood relationship of its members; its singleness of purpose; the common appeal of racial, political and religious ideals that binds it together by stronger links than steel. The United Kingdom, as a whole, may be said to have been totally unready when war broke out. But it happened that one small section of this industrial and peace-loving community was prepared, to some extent, for the mighty emergency. That was Ulster. It was immersed in business at the time, just as much as Manchester or Sheffield, and in making money out of its flourishing prosperity. But, unlike those English industrial centres, Ulster had in its history and traditions an influence which bred a combative disposition,

and ever kept burning a martial flame, even in its marts and workshops. The community was convinced that in defence of all they hold dearest in religious beliefs and political principles they might have some day, not, as in England when opinions are at stake, to flock to the polling stations at a General Election, but take to the field and fight. The very pick of the manhood of the province joined the Ulster Volunteer Force, and armed and trained themselves as soldiers. So it was that in the years immediately preceding the war it seemed almost certain they would have to follow the example of their forefathers centuries before and raise the Orange flag at Enniskillen and Derry. Then came the challenge of Germany to British ideals. The aim and purpose of the Ulster Volunteer Force remained the same, as the members conceived it, but it was turned into a wholly unexpected channel. By an astounding transformation of events they were to bleed and give their lives for all they revere and cherish, not in Ulster but on the hills and in the woods of Picardy.

The Ulster Division is entirely Protestant and Unionist; or was, until it was decimated on the Somme. It was formed out of the men who had previously bound themselves together by a solemn covenant, signed on "Ulster Day," Saturday, September 28, 1912, to stand by one another in defending, for themselves and their children, their cherished civil and religious heritage, should Home Rule be established. Thus the Division is unparalleled for its kind since Cromwell's "Iron-sides" in enlisting stern religious fervour and political enthusiasm in a fighting phalanx. It consists of twelve battalions forming three brigades. It is wholly Irish. Nine of the battalions have the regimental title of Royal Irish Rifles. The other battalions have the titles of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Royal Irish Fusiliers,

the two other regiments of the Line associated with Ulster. The battalions have also territorial classifications denoting their origin from the Ulster Volunteer Force, such as "North Belfast Volunteers"; "East Belfast Volunteers"; "Young Citizen Volunteers"; "South Belfast Volunteers"; "West Belfast Volunteers"; "South Antrim Volunteers"; "Down Volunteers"; "County Armagh Volunteers"; "Central Antrim Volunteers"; "Tyrone Volunteers"; "Donegal and Fermanagh Volunteers"; "Derry Volunteers." It has its own Engineers, Army Service Corps, Army Medical Corps and a complete Ambulance equipment. There are also reserve battalions. In the pleasant surroundings of the Botanic Gardens, Belfast, a splendid hospital was established for the care of the wounded, and the provision of artificial limbs to those who might need them; and as evidence of the characteristic thoroughness with which everything was attended to, a fund has been raised to assist members of the Division who may be left maimed and broken in health, and to support the dependents of the fallen, outside any aid that may be derived from the State. The Commander, Major-General Nugent, is a county Cavan man, a Deputy Lieutenant for the county, and a kinsman of the Earl of Westmeath. He served in the King's Royal Rifles for seventeen years, and was wounded in both the Chitral and South African campaigns.

The Division completed its training at Seaford, in Sussex. On visiting the district I was amused to find that the advent of "the wild Irish" had been anticipated by the inhabitants with much misgiving. They were apprehensive of their ancient peace being disturbed by the hilarity and commotion that spring from high and undisciplined spirits. What did happen agreeably surprised the Sussex folk. The Ulstermen quickly earned the esteem of every one for

their affable qualities and good-humour. What was particularly remarkable was that they were found to be most pliant and tractable—qualities which, by common tradition, are supposed not to be looked for in any body of Irishmen; and as for their moral behaviour, what was more astonishing still was that the church or the chapel was to them infinitely more attractive than the inn.

So the Division prepared themselves for taking the field against the enemy. They were reviewed by the King shortly before leaving for the Front. "Your prompt patriotic answer to the nation's call to arms will never be forgotten," said his Majesty. "The keen exertions of all ranks during the period of training have brought you to a state of efficiency not unworthy of any Regular Army. I am confident that in the field you will nobly uphold the traditions of the fine regiments whose names you bear. Ever since your enrolment I have closely watched the growth and steady progress of all units. I shall continue to follow with interest the fortunes of your Division. In bidding you farewell I pray God may bless you in all your undertakings." In the autumn of 1915 they went to France, determined to uphold the highest traditions of the fighting qualities of the Irish race, and burning for a chance of distinction.

During the winter months of 1915–16 the Division took its turns in the firing-line. Every battalion experienced the hardships and dangers of the front trenches, when the weather was at its worst for chills, bronchitis, pneumonia and frost-bite, and when the Germans were most active at sniping and bombing. Names of men in the Division began to appear in the lists of casualties within ten days of the landing in France. The battalions passed through these preliminary stages with courage, endurance and splendid determination. They quickly earned a fine reputation

among the highest military commanders for such soldierly qualities as willingness and cheerfulness in doing any sort of work, however unpleasant, that fell to them in the trenches, and their coolness and alertness on such dangerous missions as going out at night to the listening posts in No Man's Land and repairing the wire entanglements. Eager to snatch their share of peril and glory, they were also among the foremost in volunteering for such wild adventures as bombing raids on the German trenches under cover of darkness. One such daring exploit by the Tyrone Volunteers was the subject of a special order of the day issued by Major-General Nugent, commanding the Division. It was as follows—

"A raid on the German trenches was carried out at midnight on — by the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. The raiding party consisted of Major W. J. Peacocke, Captain J. Weir, Lieutenant W. S. Furness, Second-Lieutenant L. W. H. Stevenson, Second-Lieutenant R. W. M'Kinley, Second-Lieutenant J. Taylor, and eighty-four other ranks. The raid was completely successful, and was carried out exactly as planned. Six German dugouts, in which it is certain there were a considerable number of men, were thoroughly bombed, and a machine-gun was blown up, while a lively bombing fight took place between the blocking detachments of the raiding party and the Germans. Having accomplished the purpose of the raid, the party was withdrawn, with the loss of one man killed and two wounded. The raid was ably organised by Major Peacocke, and was carried out by the officers and men of the party exactly in accordance with the plan, and the discipline and determination of the party was all that could be desired. The Divisional Commander desires that his congratulations should be extended to all who took part in it.

"Brigadier-General Hickman, in a special brigade order, says the arrangements and plans reflect the greatest credit on Colonel A. St. Q. Ricardo, D.S.O., commanding the battalion, Major Peacocke, and the other officers concerned. The whole scheme was executed with great dash and determination, cool judgment and nerve."

Such was the fame of the raid and its success that the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, visited the battalion and personally congratulated them.

Dr. Crozier, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, visited the Division in January 1916; and after a week spent with the battalions, brought home a deep impression of their spirit and devotion. "A more capable, energetic and cheerful body of men I have never come across," he writes. "I have seen them at rifle practice, bomb-throwing, route marching, road-mending, and in the trenches, and everywhere my experience was the same—officers and men working in splendid harmony, and taking the keenest interest in any and every job they were given to do. One night I met a couple of hundred men coming back from eight days' weary work in water-logged trenches, and they were singing so lustily that I really thought at first they were coming from a concert. And yet the war is to them a terrible reality, and they have already experienced some of its horror. I could not help noticing that this has produced a deep sense of responsibility, and has intensified their belief in the reality of duty; and whether at Sunday services or at weekday informal addresses, there were no restless or inattentive men, but they seemed to welcome every word that spoke of God's presence and guidance in all life's difficulties and dangers."

## CHAPTER III

### ULSTERS' ATTACK ON THE SLOPES OF THIEPVAL

"NOT A MAN TURNED TO COME BACK, NOT ONE"

THE Division was put to the great test on July 1, 1916, the memorable day of the opening of the Battle of the Somme and the British attack in force to break through the German trenches in Picardy. It was a formidable task. The strength of the enemy positions was that they stood on high ground. That, also, was the reason of their importance. The table-land must be taken and held to permit of an advance in the stretch of open country spreading on the other side to the north. It was to be uphill work. So the battle became the greatest the world has ever known, so far, for its dimensions, the numbers engaged and the duration. The Ulstermen were in the left wing of the British lines, and the scene of their operations was, roughly, three miles of broken country, dips and swells, on each side of the river Ancre, between the village of Beaumont Hamel, nestling in a nook of the hill above the river, eastwards to the slopes of Thiepval, perched on a height about 500 feet, below the river, all within the German lines. The main body of the Division assembled in the shelter of a Thiepval wood. "Porcupine Wood" it was called by the men. The trees were so stripped of foliage and lopped into distorted shapes by enemy gun-fire that their bare

limbs stood up like quills of the fretful porcupine. At half-past seven in the morning the advance commenced. For ten days the British batteries had been continuously bombarding the whole German front. There was no sudden hush of the cannonade at the moment of the attack. For a minute there was a dramatic pause while the guns were being lifted a point higher so that they might drop their shells behind the enemy's first lines. Then the British infantry emerged from their trenches and advanced behind this furious and devastating curtain of fire and projectiles.

The morning was glorious and the prospect fine. The sun shone brightly in the most beautiful of skies, clear blue flecked with pure white clouds; and as the Ulstermen came out of the wood and ranged up in lines for the push forward, they saw, in the distant view, a sweet and pleasant upland country, the capture of which was the object of the attack. In the hollows the meadows were lush with grass, thick and glossy. There was tillage even, green crops of beetroot growing close to the ground, and tall yellowing corn, far behind the main German trenches. It was like a haunt of husbandry and peace. The only sound one would expect to hear from those harvest fields was that of the soothing reaping-machine garnering the wheat to make bread for the family board of a mother and a brood of young children. But no tiller of the soil was to be seen, near or far. The countryside to the horizon ridge was tenantless, until these tens of thousands of British soldiers suddenly came up out of the ground. Even in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 the agriculturists of northern France—then, as now, the zone of conflict—remained in the homes and pursued their avocations. During the battle of Sedan, which sealed the fate of France, an extraordinary incident occurred—a peasant was observed in one of

the valleys within the area of the fight calmly guiding the plough drawn by a big white horse. "Why should the man lose a day?" says Zola in *The Downfall*. "Corn would not cease growing, the human race would not cease living, because a few thousand men happened to be fighting." But war is waged differently now. It is spread along fronts hundreds of miles in extent and depth. Millions of men are engaged. They burrow underground and are armed with terrific engines of destruction. So it was that behind that green and pleasant land, bathed in sunshine, ferocity and death are skulking underground. Those elaborately interlacing white chalky lines over the face of the landscape mark the run of the German trenches. Each dip is a death-trap. The copses are barricaded with fallen timber and wired; the villages are citadels, the farmsteads are forts, the ridges of the two plateaux are each one succession of batteries. Swallows were darting to and fro hawking for flies for their young, and in the clear air soaring larks were singing to their mates brooding on their eggs in the grass, showing that Nature was still carrying on her eternal processes, but the husbandman had fled the deceiving scene, and the after-crops from his old sowings of corn and mustard were mixed with weeds in No Man's Land.

Things befell the Ulstermen, when they appeared in the open, which were things indeed. The fortunes of war varied along the British advance. A group of war correspondents on a height near the town of Albert, about midway in the line, noticed that while some of the British battalions were comparatively unmolested, the resistance of the enemy to the left or west was of the fiercest and most desperate character. The Germans seem to have expected the main assault at this part of the field of operations. Their guns and men were here most heavily massed. On the left of

the valley made by a curve of the river Ancre is a crest, in a crease of which lay on that July morning the village of Beaumont Hamel, or rather its site, for it had been blown almost out of existence by the British artillery fire. Under the village—as shown by explorations made after it fell—were a vast system of passages and cellars, in which whole battalions of Germans found shelter from the bombardment. On the right of the valley is the plateau of Thiepval. It was as strong a position as the consummate skill of German engineers and gunners could make it. On the sky line at the top of a ridge of the plateau were the ruins of the village of Thiepval—heaps of bricks and slates and timber that once were walls and roofs of houses—encircled by blackened stumps of trees that once in the spring were all pink and white of the apple blossom. The ground sloping down to the valley, and the valley itself was a network of German trenches—mostly turned into a maze of upheaved earth-mounds by shell-fire—studded with many machine-gun posts. The main part of the Ulster Division advanced across the valley that rose gently, with many undulations upwards, to the slopes on the western or left side of Thiepval. They had to take what were called the A, B and C lines of trenches. As will be seen, they pushed far beyond their objective.

Clouds of smoke had been liberated from the British lines to form a screen for the attackers. Into it the men disappeared as they marched, line after line, in extended order, over the intervening stretch of ground. But almost immediately they were all scourged—especially the Ulster battalions on the extreme left moving towards Beaumont Hamel—with machine-gun fire poured at them from various points, to the continuous accompaniment of short, sharp, annihilating knocks. The bullets literally came like water from an immense hose with a perforated top. The streams

of lead crossed and re-crossed, sweeping the ranks about the ankles, at the waist; breast high, around their heads. Comrades were to be seen falling on all sides, right, left, front and rear. So searching was the fire that it was useless to seek cover, and advance in short rushes in between. So the lines kept undauntedly on their way, apparently not minding the bullets any more than if they were a driving and splashing shower of hail.

"Let her rip, ye devils!" shouted some of the Ulstermen in jocular defiance at the enemy and his machine-gun; "and," said an officer relating the story, "the Bosche let her rip all right." One of the wounded rank and file told me that in the advance he lost entire perception of the roar of the British guns which was so impressive as he lay with his comrades in the wood, though they still continued their thundering. Their terrible diapason of sound seemed to be lulled into absolute silence, so far as he was concerned, by the hollow, crepitating "tap-t-t-tap" of the German machine-guns; and the swish, swish, swish of the bullets, of all the noises of battle the most unnerving to soldiers assailing a position. But the Ulstermen were in a mood of the highest exaltation, a mood in which troops may be destroyed but will not easily be subjugated. The day had thrilling historic memories for them.

" July the First on the banks of the Boyne,  
There was a famous battle."

The opening lines of their song, "The Boyne Water," recounting the deeds of their forefathers, came inevitably to their minds. "Just as we were about to attack," writes Rifleman Edward Taylor of the West Belfast Volunteers, "Captain Gaffikin took out an orange handkerchief and, waving it around his head, shouted, 'Come on, boys, this is the first of July!'"

"No surrender!" roared the men. It was the answer given by the gallant defenders of Derry from their walls to King James and the besieging Jacobites. On the fields of Picardy new and noble meanings were put into these old, out-worn Irish battle-cries. One sergeant of the Inniskillings went into the fray with his Orange sash on him. Some of the men provided themselves with orange lilies before they went up to the assembly trenches, and these they now wore in their breasts. But, indeed, their colours were growing in profusion at their feet when they came out of the trenches—yellow charlock, crimson poppies and blue cornflowers, and many put bunches of these wild flowers in their tunics. So the Ulstermen were keen to prove their metal. They divided their forces and advanced to German positions on the right and left. Through it all their battle-shout was "No surrender." But there was one surrender which they were prepared to make, and did make—the surrender, for the cause, of their young lives and all the bright hopes of youth.

When the battalions on the right reached the first German line they found shapeless mounds and cavities of soil and stones and timber, shattered strands and coils of barbed wire, where the trenches had been, and the dead bodies of the men who were in occupation of them at the bombardment. The Ulstermen then pushed on to the second line, which still held living men of courage and tenacity who had to be disposed of by bayonet and bomb. On to the third line the Ulstermen went at a steady pace. They were still being whipped by machine-gun fire. Their ranks were getting woefully thinner. In their tracks they left dead and wounded. At the sight of a familiar face among the curiously awkward attitudes and shapes of those instantaneously killed there was many a cold tug at the heart-strings of the advancing men, and many a groan of sorrow was suppressed on their lips.

The moaning of the wounded was also terrible to hear, but their spirit was magnificent. "Lying on the ground there under fire, they had no thought of their own danger, but only of the comrades who were going forward, and they kept shouting words of encouragement after the attacking column until it was well out of sight," said an Inniskilling Fusilier. "One company, recruited mainly from the notorious Shankill road district of Belfast, was going forward, when a wounded man recognised some of his chums in it. 'Give them it hot for the Shankill road,' he cried, and his comrades answered with a cheer." The same man, giving a general account of the fiercely contested attack on the enemy positions, said, "It was a case of playing leapfrog with death, but all obstacles were overcome, and the Fusiliers carried the enemy trenches with a magnificent rush. The Huns turned on them like baffled tigers and tried to hurl the Irishmen out again, but they might as well have tried to batter down the walls of Derry with toothpicks. The Inniskillings held their ground, and gradually forced the enemy still further back."

The German trenches, with their first, second, third, fourth and fifth lines, formed a system of defences of considerable depth, into which the Ulstermen had now penetrated for distances varying from two to three miles in depth. It was a land of horrible desolation. The ground at this point was almost bare of vegetation. It was torn and lacerated with shell holes. The few trees that remained standing were reduced to splintered and jagged stumps. All was smoke, flashes, uproar and nauseating smells. In this stricken battle area the defence was as stubborn and desperate as the attack. It seemed impossible for men with a nervous system and imagination to retain their reason and resolution in the terrific, intensive and searching preliminary bombardment. Never-

theless, the Germans did it. The British guns had, indeed, wrought widespread havoc. Not only lines of trenches were pounded to bits, but spots outside, affording concealment for guns and troops, were discovered and blown to atoms. There were, however, deep dug-outs going as many as thirty feet below ground, and in some cases, even at that depth, there were trapdoors and stairs leading to still lower chambers, and up from these underground fortifications the Germans came when the cannonade lifted. There were also hidden machine-gun shelters in the hollows and on the slopes which the British artillery failed to find. The resistance offered to the advance of the Ulstermen was accordingly of the most obstinate and persistent nature. The hand-to-hand fight with bayonet and bomb at the third line of trenches was described by a man of the Irish Rifles as "a Belfast riot on the top of Mount Vesuvius." No more need be said. The phrase conveys a picture of men madly struggling and yelling amid fire and smoke and the abominable stench of battle. Yet the enemy's fourth line fell before these men who would not be stopped. There remained the fifth line, and the Ulstermen were preparing to move forward to it when the order came to fall back. The state of affairs at this time of the evening is well explained by one of the men—

" We had been so eager that we had pressed too far forward, and were well in advance of our supporting troops, thus laying ourselves open to flank attacks. The position became more serious as the day advanced, and the supporting troops were unable to make further progress, while the Huns kept hurrying up fresh men. We kept shouting the watchword of 'No Surrender,' with which our fathers had cheered themselves in the siege of Derry, and every time the Huns attacked we sent them reeling back with something to remind them that they were fighting Irishmen. We couldn't help taunting them a lot. 'Would you like some Irish rebellion?' we called out to them, and they didn't like it. They kept throwing

in fresh reinforcements all day, and gradually the pressure became almost unbearable. Still we held our ground, and would have continued to hold it if necessary."

"Retirement," he adds, "is never a pleasant task, especially after you have fought your corner as we fought ours. We felt that the ground won was part of ourselves, but orders had to be obeyed, and so we went back." The retirement was to the third line of trenches, at the point known as "the Crucifix," just north-west of Thiepval. It was carried out at night-fall, after fourteen hours' continuous fighting. This section of the Division, in the words of Major-General Nugent, "captured nearly 600 prisoners, and carried its advance triumphantly to the limits of the objective laid down."

The battalions, two in number, operating on the left at Beaumont Hamel, were not so fortunate. They were broken to pieces by the devastating machine-gun fire. The remnants, by a magnificent effort, succeeded in getting into the German trenches. They were held up there by an utterly impassable curtain of shells and bullets. It was not their fault that they could not advance any further. They had to face a more terrific ordeal than any body of men have had to encounter in battle before. "They did all that men could do," says Major Nugent, "and, in common with every battalion in the Division, showed the most conspicuous courage and devotion."

Lieut.-Colonel Ambrose Ricardo, D.S.O., of Lion House, Strahane, commander of the Tyrone battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, gives an account of the experience of the Ulster Division which is of the greatest value for the reasons it supplies why the Division lost so heavily and thus were unable to hold the advanced positions they had taken. He first describes how his men set out for their plunge into

the terrible unknown. "Every gun on both sides fired as fast as it could, and during the din our dear boys just walked out of the wood and up rumps we had cut through our parapet and out through lanes in our wire," he says. "I shall never forget for one minute the extraordinary sight. The Derrys on our left were so eager they started a few minutes before the ordered time, and the Tyrone were not going to be left behind, and they got going without delay. No fuss, no shouting, no running; everything orderly, solid and thorough, just like the men themselves. Here and there a boy would wave his hand to me as I shouted good luck to them through my megaphone, and all had a happy face. Most were carrying loads. Fancy advancing against heavy fire carrying a heavy roll of barbed wire on your shoulder!"

Then dealing with the Division generally, Colonel Ricardo states that the leading battalions suffered comparatively little until they almost reached the German front line, when they came under appalling machine-gun fire which obliterated whole platoons. "And, alas for us," he cries, "the Division on our right could not get on, and the same happened to the Division on our left, so we came in for the concentrated fire of what would have been spread over three Divisions. But every man who remained standing pressed on, and, without officers or non-commissioned officers, they carried on, faithful to their job. Not a man turned to come back, not one."

Eventually small parties of all the battalions of the Division—except the two operating towards Beaumont Hamel—gathered together in the section of the German third line, which was their part in the general British advance. They had captured, in fact, a portion of the famous Schwabon Redoubt on the summit of the ridge facing them, and set to work to consolidate it. "The situation after the first two hours

was indeed a cruel one for the Ulster Division," continues Colonel Ricardo. "There they were, a wedge driven into the German lines, only a few hundred yards wide, and for fourteen hours they bore the brunt of the German machine-gun fire and shell-fire from three sides, and even from behind they were not safe. The parties told off to deal with the German first and second lines had in many cases been wiped out, and the Germans sent parties from the flanks in behind our boys. Yet the Division took 800 prisoners, and could have taken hundreds more, had they been able to handle them."

Major John Peacocke, "a most gallant and dashing officer" (as Colonel Ricardo describes him), was sent forward to see how matters stood. He crossed "No Man's Land" at a time when the fire sweeping it was most intense. Taking charge of the defence of the captured position, he gave to each unit a certain task to do in furtherance of the common aim. Then he sent runners back with messages asking for reinforcements, for water and for bombs. "But," says Colonel Ricardo, "no one had any men in reserve, and no men were left to send across. We were told reinforcements were at hand, and to hold on, but it was difficult, I suppose, to get fresh troops up in time. At any rate the help did not come. In the end, at 10.30 p.m. (they had got to the third line at 8.30 a.m.), the glorious band in front had to come back. They fought to the last and threw their last bomb, and were so exhausted that most of them could not speak. Shortly after they came back help came, and the line they had taken and held was reoccupied without opposition, the Germans, I suppose, being as exhausted as we were. Our side eventually lost the wedge-like bit after some days. It was valueless, and could only be held at very heavy cost. We were withdrawn late on Sunday evening, very tired and weary."

A private in one of the battalions sent to his parents in Ulster a very vivid account of the advance. As he was crossing "No Man's Land" two aspects of it, in striking contrast, arose in his mind. "How often had I, while on sentry duty in our own trenches, looked out over that same piece of ground," he says. "How calm and peaceful it looked then; how fresh, green, and invitingly cool looked that long, blowing grass! Now, what a ghastly change! Not a level or green spot remained. Great, jagged, gaping craters covered the blackish, smoking ground, furrowed and ploughed by every description of projectile and explosive. In the blue sky above white, puffy clouds of shrapnel burst, bespattering the earth below with a rain of bullets and jagged shrapnel missiles."

Tripping and stumbling went the men over the broken and ragged ground. "Fellows in front, beside, and behind me would fall; some, with a lurch forward, wounded; others, with a sudden, abrupt halt, a sickly wheel, would drop, give one eerie twist, and lie still—dead!" They find the first line in the possession of comrades; and moving on to the second, came to blows there with the enemy. "An Inniskilling, scarcely more than a boy, standing on the parapet, yells madly 'No surrender,' and fires several shots into the German mob. From every part of the trench we closed forward, bayonet poised, on the crowd of grey figures. A short scuffle; then we swayed back again, leaving a heap of blood-stained greyishness on the ground. 'Come on, boys!' yells the lieutenant, springing up on to the parapet. 'Come on, the Ulsters.' Up we scramble after him and rush ahead towards the far-off third line. Vaguely I recollect that mad charge. A few swirlings here and there of grey-clad figures with upraised hands yelling 'Kamerad.' Heaps of wounded and dead. Showers of dust and earth and lead. Deafening explosions

and blinding smoke. But what concerned me most and what I saw clearest were the few jagged stumps of the remnants of the wire entanglements and the ragged parapet of the third line—our goal!"

From this enemy trench the Ulsterman looked back over the ground he had covered, and this is what he saw: "Through the dense smoke pour hundreds and hundreds of Tommies, with flashing bayonets and distorted visages, apparently cheering and yelling. You couldn't hear them for the noise of the guns and the exploding shells. Everywhere among those fearless Ulstermen burst high-explosive shells, hurling dozens of them up in the air, while above them and among them shrapnel bursts with sharp, ear-splitting explosions. But worst of all these was the silent swish, swish, swishing of the machine-gun bullets, claiming their victims by the score, cutting down living sheaves, and leaving bunches of writhing, tortured flesh on the ground." He, too, noticed that their co-operating Divisions had failed, for some reason, to advance. "Look there, something *must* be wrong!" he called out to his comrades. "Why, they're not advancing on *that* side at all," pointing towards the left flank. "Not a sign of life could be seen," he says. "The Ulster Division were out to the Huns' first, second, third, fourth, and even fifth lines, with all the German guns pelting us from every side and at every angle."

Many a brave and self-sacrificing deed was done in these affrighting scenes. Here are a few instances taken haphazard from the records of one battalion alone, the 9th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. They were repeated a hundredfold throughout the Division.

Corporal Thomas M'Clay, Laghey, county Donegal, assisted Second-Lieutenant Lawrence to take twenty prisoners. He conveyed them single-handed over "No Man's Land," and then returned to the

German third line, all the time having been under very heavy fire. When he got back he had been fighting hard for ten hours. Private Thomas Gibson, of Coalisland, saw three Germans working a machine-gun. He attacked them alone, and killed them all with his clubbed rifle. Corporal John Conn, Caledon, came across two of our machine-guns out of action. He repaired them under fire, and with them destroyed a German flanking party. He carried both guns himself part of the way back, but had to abandon one, he was so utterly exhausted. Lance-Corporal Daniel Lyttle, Leckpatrick, Strabane, was trying to save two machine-guns from the enemy when he found himself cut off. He fired one gun until the ammunition was spent, then destroyed both guns and bombed his way back to the rest of his party at the Crucifix line. Sergeant Samuel Kelly, Belfast, volunteered to take a patrol from the Crucifix line to ascertain how things were going on our right. Corporal Daniel Griffiths, Dublin; Lance-Corporal Lewis Pratt, Cavan; and Private William Abraham, Ballinamallard, went with him. The latter was killed, but the remainder got back with valuable information. Sergeant Kelly did great work to the last in organising and encouraging his men when all the officers of his company had fallen. Corporal Daniel Griffith, Lance-Corporal Lewis Pratt, with Private Fred Carter, Kingstown, bombed and shot nine Germans who were trying to mount a machine-gun. Private Samuel Turner, Dundrun, and Private Clarence Rooney, Clogher, forced a barricaded dug-out, captured fifteen Germans and destroyed an elaborate signalling apparatus, thereby preventing information getting back. Lance-Corporal William Neely, Clogher; Private Samuel Spence, Randalstown; Private James Sproule, Castle-derg; and Private William R. Reid, Aughnacloy, were members of a party blocking the return of

Germans along a captured trench. Their officer and more than half their comrades were killed, but they held on and covered the retirement of the main party, eventually getting back in good order themselves and fighting every inch of the way. Private Fred Gibson, Caledon, pushed forward alone with his machine-gun, and fought until all his ammunition was used. Private James Mahaffy, Caledon, was badly wounded in the leg early in the day, and was ordered back. He refused to go, and continued to carry ammunition for his machine-gun. Lance-Corporal John Hunter, Coleraine, succeeded in picking off several German gunners. His cool and accurate shooting at such a time was remarkable. Private Robert Monteith, Lislap, Omagh, had his leg taken off above the knee. He used his rifle and bayonet as a crutch, and continued to advance. Private Wallie Scott, Belfast, met five Germans. He captured them single-handed, and marched them back to the enemy second line, where a sergeant had a larger party of prisoners gathered.

## CHAPTER IV

### FOUR VICTORIA CROSSES TO THE ULSTER DIVISION

#### BRILLIANT ADDITIONS TO THE RECORD OF IRISH VALOUR AND ROMANCE

THE most signal proof of the exceptional gallantry of the Ulstermen is afforded by the awarding of four Victoria Crosses to two officers and two privates of the Division. There is many a Division that has not won a single V.C. They must not be belittled on that score; their ill-fortune and not their service is to blame. But the rarity of the distinction, and the exceptional deed of bravery and self-sacrifice needed to win it, reflects all the more glory on the achievements of the Ulstermen. By the winning of four Victoria Crosses the Ulster Division have made a name which will shine gloriously for all time in the imperishable record of British gallantry on the battlefield.

Private William Frederick McFadzean of the Royal Irish Rifles was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for sacrificing himself deliberately to save his comrades. The men of the battalion were packed together in a concentration trench on the morning of July 1. Just prior to the advance bombs were being distributed for use when the German lines were reached. One of the boxes of these missiles slipped down the trench and emptied its contents on the floor.

Two of the safety pins fell out. Shouts of alarm were raised. Men who would face the German bombs undaunted shrank with a purely physical reaction from the peril which thus accidentally threatened them. They knew that in a moment these bombs would explode with a terrific detonation and scatter death and mutilation among them. In that instant McFadzean flung himself bodily on the top of the bombs. He was a bomber himself, and he well knew the danger, but he did not hesitate. The bombs exploded. All their tremendous powers of destruction were concentrated upon the body which enveloped them in an embrace. McFadzean was blown literally to bits. One only of his comrades was injured.

McFadzean was only twenty-one years of age. He was born at Lurgan, County Armagh, and was a Presbyterian. A member of the Ulster Volunteer Force, he joined the Young Citizens' Battalion (Belfast) of the Royal Irish Rifles in September 1914.

The other private who won the Victoria Cross is Robert Quigg, also of the Royal Irish Rifles. On the morning after the advance he went out seven times, alone and in the face of danger, to try to find his wounded officer, Sir Harry Macnaghten of Dun-daraye, Antrim, and returned on each occasion with a disabled man. Private Quigg is thirty-one, the son of Robert Quigg, a guide and boatman at the Giant's Causeway, Antrim. He was a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force, and enlisted in the Royal Irish Rifles (Central Antrim Volunteers) in September, 1914. He is an Episcopalian, an Orangeman and a member of the flute band of his lodge.

The official account of Private Quigg's exploit is as follows—

"For most conspicuous bravery. He advanced to the assault with his platoon three times. Early next morning,

hearing a rumour that his platoon officer was lying out wounded, he went out seven times to look for him under heavy shell and machine-gun fire, each time bringing back a wounded man. The last man he dragged in on a waterproof sheet from within a few yards of the enemy's wire. He was seven hours engaged in this most gallant work, and finally was so exhausted that he had to give it up."

It was also "for most conspicuous bravery" in searching for wounded men under continuous and heavy fire that Lieutenant Geoffrey Shillington Cather of the Royal Irish Fusiliers got the Victoria Cross. He lost his life in thus trying to succour others on the night and morning after the advance of the Ulster Division. "From 7 p.m. till midnight he searched 'No Man's Land,' and brought in three wounded men," says the official account. "Next morning, at 8 a.m., he continued his search, brought in another wounded man, and gave water to others, arranging for their rescue later. Finally, at 10.30 a.m., he took out water to another man, and was proceeding further on when he was himself killed. All this was carried out in full view of the enemy, and under direct machine-gun fire, and intermittent artillery fire. He set a splendid example of courage and self-sacrifice."

Lieutenant Cather was twenty-five years of age, a son of Mrs. Cather, Priory Road, West Hampstead, London. His father, who was dead, had been a tea merchant in the City. On his mother's side, Lieutenant Cather was a grandson of the late Mr. Thomas Shillington, of Tavanagh House, Portadown; and on his father's side, of the late Rev. Robert Cather, a distinguished minister of the Irish Methodist Church. He was a nephew of Captain D. Graham Shillington, of Ardeevin, Portadown, who, with his son, Lieutenant T. G. Shillington, was serving in the same battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Lieutenant Cather was educated at Rugby. He first joined the

Public Schools' Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment), and obtained his commission in the County Armagh Volunteers in May, 1915.

The second officer of the Ulster Division to win the Victoria Cross was Captain Eric N. F. Bell of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, whose gallantry on July 1 also cost him his life. He was about twenty-two years old, one of three soldier sons of Captain E. H. Bell, formerly of the Inniskillings (serving in Egypt in a garrison battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment), and Mrs. Bell, an Enniskillen lady living in Bootle. The two brothers of the late Captain Bell hold commissions in the Ulster Division. The deeds for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross are thus set out in the official account—

"For most conspicuous bravery. He was in command of a trench mortar battery, and advanced with the infantry in the attack. When our front line was hung up by enfilading machine-gun fire Captain Bell crept forward and shot the machine gunner. Later, on no less than three occasions, when our bombing parties, which were clearing the enemy's trenches, were unable to advance, he went forward and threw trench mortar bombs among the enemy. When he had no more bombs available he stood on the parapet, under intense fire, and used a rifle with great coolness and effect on the enemy advancing to counter-attack. Finally he was killed rallying and reorganising infantry parties which had lost their officers. All this was outside the scope of his normal duties with his battery. He gave his life in his supreme devotion to duty."

Colonel Ricardo, in a very fine and sympathetic letter to the bereaved mother, gives additional particulars of Captain Bell's gallantry—

"The General, hearing that his parents were old friends of mine, has asked me to write on his behalf, sending his sympathy and telling of the gallantry of Eric, which was outstanding on a day when supreme courage and gallantry was the order of the day. Eric was in command on July 1 of his trench mortar battery, which had very important duties to perform, and which very materially helped the advance. We know

from his servant, Private Stevenson, a great deal of Eric's share in the day's work. He went forward with the advance, and, coming under heavy machine-gun fire, and seeing where it came from, he took a rifle and crawled towards the machine-gun and then shot the gunner in charge, thus enabling a party on his flank to capture the gun. This gallant action saved many lives.

"When in the German lines Eric worked splendidly, collecting scattered units and helping to organise the defence. He was most energetic, and never ceased to encourage the men and set all a very fine example. Having exhausted all his mortar ammunition, he organised a carrying party and started back to fetch up more shells; it was whilst crossing back to our own line that Eric was hit. He was shot through the body, and died in a few moments without suffering. His servant stayed with him to the end and arrived back quite exhausted, and has now been admitted into hospital. Nothing could have exceeded the courage and resource displayed by Eric. The Brigade are proud that he belonged to it. It is only what I should have expected from him. It must be a solace to his father and mother that he died such a gallant death. He was a born soldier and a credit to his regiment. May I add my heartfelt sympathy to my dear old friends."

Among the many other distinctions gained by the Division were Military Crosses to two of the chaplains: Captain Rev. J. Jackson Wright and Captain Rev. Joseph Henry McKew. Captain Wright was the Presbyterian minister of Ballyshannon, County Donegal. He gave up that position temporarily to accept an Army chaplaincy, and was posted to the Ulster Division in November, 1914, being attached to the Inniskilling Brigade. He was ordained in 1893. Captain McKew was curate of the parish of Clones prior to being appointed Church of Ireland chaplain to the troops in August, 1915. He is a Trinity man, and during his university career won a moderatorship in history. Ordained in 1914, he has spent his entire ministry under Canon Ruddell in Clones. Before going to the Front he was a chaplain at the Curragh.

The company officers led their men with conspicuous gallantry and steadfastness. "Come on, Ulsters;" "Remember July the First," they cried. They were severely thinned out before the day was far advanced. It was the same with the non-commissioned ranks. At the end several parties of men desperately fighting had not an officer or a non-commissioned officer left. Among the officers lost were two brothers, Lieutenant Holt Montgomery Hewitt, Machine-gun Corps (Ulster Division), and Second-Lieutenant William Arthur Hewitt, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (Tyrone Volunteers). They were the sons of Mr. J. H. Hewitt, manager of the workshops for the blind, Royal Avenue, Belfast. A third son, Lieutenant Ernest Henry Hewitt, Royal Lancaster Regiment, was killed in action on June 15, 1915. The three brothers were members of the Ulster Volunteer Force before the War. They were prominent athletes, and played Rugby football for the North of Ireland club. In that respect they were typical of the officers of the Ulster Division. They were also typical of them for high-mindedness and cheerful devotion to duty. "Poor Holt, the most genial and lovable of souls!" exclaims Lieutenant E. W. Crawford, the adjutant of his battalion of the Inniskillings. "Willie led his platoon fearlessly over the top." The commanding officer of the battalion, Colonel Ricardo, in a letter to Mr. Hewitt, pays a remarkable tribute to Second-Lieutenant William Holt. He says: "It was a sad day for us, and I feel quite stunned and heart-broken. Your Willie was one of the nicest-minded boys I ever knew. My wife saw a letter he wrote to the widow of a man in his company, and she told me it was the most beautiful letter of sympathy she had ever read. No one but a spiritually-minded boy could have written such a letter. I made him my assistant-adjutant, and of all my young lads I could

spare him the least. No words can express the sympathy we all feel for yourself and Mrs. Hewitt and your family in this grievous double blow."

Captain C. C. Craig, Royal Irish Rifles (South Antrim Volunteers), M.P. for South Antrim and brother of Colonel James Craig, M.P. for East Down, was taken prisoner. When last seen he was lying wounded in a shell hole at the most advanced point of the narrow and dangerous salient carved by the Ulstermen in the enemy lines, shouting encouragement to his company. In a letter to his wife, written from a hospital at Gutersloh, Westphalia, Germany, and dated July 13, Captain Craig states it was while he was directing his men to convert the C line of trenches into defences against the Germans by making them face the opposite way, that he was hit by a piece of shrapnel in the back of the leg below the knee. "This put me out of action," he says. "I was bandaged up, and, as I could not get about, I sent a message to R. Neill to take command, and I crawled to a shell-hole, where I lay for six hours. This was at about 10 a.m. on the 1st July. During this six hours the shelling and machine-gun fire was very heavy, but my shell-hole protected me so well that I was not hit again, except for a very small piece of shrapnel on the arm, which only made a small cut." At about four o'clock in the afternoon the enemy made a counter attack, during which Captain Craig was found and taken prisoner. Describing his treatment as a prisoner, Captain Craig says—

"I had to hobble into a trench close at hand, where I stayed till ten o'clock, till two Germans took me to another line of trenches about 400 or 500 yards further back. This was the worst experience I had, as my leg was stiff and painful. The space between the lines was being heavily shelled by our guns, and my two supporters were naturally anxious to get over the ground as quickly as possible, and did not give me much rest,

so I was very glad when, after what seemed an age, though it was not more than fifteen minutes or so, we got to the trench. I was put in a deep dug-out, where there were a lot of officers and men, and they were all very kind to me, and gave me food and water, and here I spent the night. My leg was by now much swollen, but not painful except when I tried to walk. There were no stretchers, so in the morning I had to hobble as best I could out of the trenches till we came to a wood. Soon after I passed a dug-out where some artillery officers lived, and the captain seeing my condition refused to allow me to go any further on foot, and took me in and gave me food and wine, and set his men to make a kind of sling to carry me in. This proved a failure; as I was so heavy, I nearly broke the men's shoulders. He then got a wheelbarrow, and in this I was wheeled a mile or more to a dressing station, where my wound was dressed, and I was inoculated for tetanus. That night I was taken to a village, and had a comfortable bed and a good sleep."

Another officer of the Division who was "pipped," as he calls it, tells in an interesting story how he worked himself along the ground towards the British lines, and his experiences on the way. "By and by," he says, "a Boche corporal came crawling along after me. He shouted some gibberish, and I waved him on towards our lines with my revolver. He wasn't wounded, but he was devilish anxious to make sure of being a prisoner—begad, you don't get our chaps paying them the same compliment. They'll take any risks sooner than let the Boche get them as prisoners. So this chap lay down close beside me. I told him to be off out o' that, but he lay close, and I'd no breath to spare. That crawling is tiresome work. Presently I saw a man of ours coming along, poking round with his rifle and bayonet. He'd been detailed to shepherd in prisoners. He was surprised to see me. Then he saw my Boche. 'Hell to yer sowl!' says he; 'what the divil are ye doin' there beside my officer? Get up,' says he, 'an' be off with ye out a' that!' And he poked at him with his bayonet; so the fellow

squealed and plucked up enough courage to get up on his feet and run for our lines. Our own man wanted to help me back—a good fellow, you know—but I'd time enough before me, so told him to carry on. I wriggled all the way back to our line, and a stretcher-bearer got me there, so I was all right."

When they were relieved, the survivors of the Division came back very tired and bedraggled, their faces black with battle smoke and their uniforms white from the chalky soil. But they were in a joyous mood; and well they might be, for they had battered in one of the doors of the supposed impregnable German trenches and left it ajar. Their exploits add a brilliant chapter to the record of Irish valour and romance. Grief for the dead will soon subside into a sad memory, but the glory of what they accomplished will endure for ever. Because of it, the First of July is certain to be as great a day for Ulster in the future as the Twelfth has been in the past.

## CHAPTER V

### COMBATIVENESS OF THE IRISH SOLDIER

#### THE BRITISH BLENDS OF COURAGE

THERE is a story of Wellington and his army in the Peninsular campaign which embodies, in a humorous fashion, the still popular idea of the chief national characteristics of the races within the United Kingdom.

It says that if Wellington wanted a body of troops to get to a particular place quickly by forced marches he gave an assurance that on their arrival Scottish regiments would be given their arrears of pay; English regiments would have a good dinner of roast beef, and the bait held out to Irish regiments to give speed to their feet, however weary, was an all-round tot of grog. The Welsh, it will be noticed, are not in the story. This cannot be explained by saying they had yet to achieve separate national distinction on the field of battle. The 23rd Regiment of Foot (Royal Welsh Fusiliers) served under Wellington and contributed more than their fair share to the martial renown of the British Army. It is solely due, I think, to the fact that they had not yet emerged from their absorption in the English generally. But, to round off the story, what motive of a material kind would impel the Welsh Regiments to greater military exertions? Shall we say any one of the three inducements mentioned—pay, grub or grog, or, better still, all of them together?

The present war has provided the most searching tests of the qualities of the races involved in it. They have all been profoundly moved to the uttermost deeps of their being, both in the mass and as individuals. The superficial trappings of society and even of civilisation have fallen from them, and they appear as they really are—brave or cowardly, noble or base, unselfish or egotistical. We see our own soldiers, English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish, not perhaps quite as each came from the hands of Nature, but certainly as the original minting of each has been modified only by the influence of racial environment. All the races within the United Kingdom are alike in this, that each is a medley of many kinds of dissimilar individuals with very varied faculties and attributes. But there are certain broad, main characteristics which distinguish in the mass each racial aggregate of dissimilar units; and it is these instincts, ideas, habits, customs, held in common, that fundamentally separate each nationality from the other. That is what I mean by racial environment.

The soldiers of the United Kingdom possess in general certain fine qualities of character and conduct which may be ascribed to the traditions and training of the British Army. But when we come to consider them racially we find that their points of difference are more striking even than their points of similarity. Each nationality evolves its own type of soldier, and every type has its distinctly marked attributes. As troops, taken in the mass, are the counterpart of the nations from which they spring, and, indeed, cannot be anything else, so they must, for one thing, reveal in fighting the particular sort of martial spirit possessed by their race. Though I am an Irishman, I would not be so boastful as to say that the Irish soldiers have a superior kind of courage to which neither the English, the Scottish nor the Welsh can

lay claim. They are all equally brave, but the manifestation of their bravery is undoubtedly different—that is, different not so much in degree as in kind. In a word, courage, like humour, is not racial or geographical, but, like humour also, it takes on a racial or geographical flavour.

General Sir Ian Hamilton has written : "When, once upon a time, a Queen of Spain saw the Grenadier Guards she remarked they were strapping fellows; as the 92nd Highlanders went by she said, 'The battalion marches well'; but, at the aspect of the Royal Irish, the words 'Bloody War!' were wrung from her reluctant lips." After a good deal of reading on the subject, and some thought, I venture to suggest the following generalisations as to the qualities which distinguish the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish, in valour, one from another.

English—the courage of an exalted sense of honour and devotion to duty, and of the national standard of conduct which requires them to show, at all costs, that they are better men than their opponents, whoever they may be.

Scottish—the courage of mental as well as physical tenacity, coolly set upon achieving the purpose in view.

Welsh—the courage of perfervid emotion, religious in its intensity.

Irish—the courage of dare-devilry, and the rapture of battle.

All these varieties of courage are to be found, to some extent, in each distinct national unit, and thus they cross and recross the racial boundary lines within our Army. Still, I think they represent broadly the dominant distinguishing characteristics of the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish as fighting men. The

qualities lacking in one race are supplied by the others; and the harmonious whole into which all are fused provide that fire and dash, cool discipline, doggedness and high spirits for which our troops have always been noted. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, is said to have made a most interesting estimate of the qualities of the soldiers of the three home races under his command. The Irish are best for brilliant and rapid attack, and the English are best for holding a position against heavy onslaughts. The Scottish, he thinks, are not quite so fiery and dashing in assault as the Irish, but they are more so than the English, and not quite so tenacious in holding on under tremendous fire as the English, but they are more so than the Irish.

It is this combination of attributes which enables the British Army, more perhaps than any other army, to get out of a desperate situation with superb serenity and honour. There is an old saying that it never knows when it is beaten. Soult, Marshal of France, whose brilliant tactics in the Peninsular War so often countered the consummate strategy of Wellington and the furious dash of the Irish infantry, bore testimony in a novel and vivid way to this trait of the British. "They could not be persuaded they were beaten," he said. "I always thought them bad soldiers," he also said. "I turned their right, pierced their centre, they were everywhere broken; the day was mine; and yet they did not know it and would not run."

Any other troops, in a hopeless pass, would retreat or surrender, and would do so without disgrace. There are numberless instances in British military history where our troops, faced with fearful odds, stood, magnificently stubborn, with their backs to the wall, as it were, willing to be fired at and annihilated rather than give in. Mr. John Redmond tells a story of a reply given by an English General when asked his opinion

of the Irish troops. "Oh," he said, "they are magnificent fighters, but rotten soldiers. When they receive an order to retire their answer is, 'Be damned if we will.'" I may add, in confirmation of this story, that one of the incidents of the retreat from Mons, which was the subject afterwards of an inquiry by the military authorities, was the refusal of a few hundred men of a famous Irish regiment to retire from what appeared to be an untenable position, much less to surrender, one or other of which courses was suggested by their superior officer. The answer of the men was as stunning as a blow of a shillelagh, or as sharp as a bayonet thrust. "If we had thrown down our arms," one of them said to me, "we could never have shown our faces in Ireland again."

Racial distinctions are to be seen on the weak side as well as on the strong side of character. Each nationality, regarded as fighters, has therefore its own particular failing. The Irish are disposed to be foolhardy, or heedless of consequences. It is the fault of their special kind of courage. "The British soldier's indifference to danger, while it is one of his finest qualities, is often the despair of his officers," says Mr. Valentine Williams, one of the most brilliant and experienced of war correspondents, in his book, *With our Army in Flanders*, and he adds, "The Irish regiments are the worst. Their recklessness is proverbial." They are either insensible to the perils they run, or, what is more likely, contemptuous of them.

I have been given several examples of the ways they will needlessly expose themselves. Though they can get to the rear through the safe, if wayward, windings of the communication trenches, it is a common thing for them to climb the parapets and go straight across the open fields under fire so as to save half an hour. To go by the trenches, they will argue, doubles the time taken in getting back without halving the risk.

In like manner, they prefer to go down a road swept by the enemy's artillery, which leads direct to their destination, rather than waste time by following a secure but circuitous way round. There is an Irish proverb against foolhardy risks which says it is better to be late for five minutes than dead all your lifetime, but evidently it is disregarded by Irish soldiers at the Front.

An English officer in the Royal Irish Regiment writes : "Really the courage and cheerfulness of our grand Irish boys are wonderful. They make light of their wounds, and, owing to their stamina, make rapid recoveries. The worst of them is they get very careless of the German bullets after a while and go wandering about as if they were at home." Another English officer begins an amusing story of an Irish orderly in an English regiment with the comment : "I shall never now believe that there is on this earth any man to beat the Irish for coolness and pluck." The officer was in his dug-out, and first noticed the Irishman chopping wood to make a fire for cooking purposes on a road which was made dangerous during the day by German snipers. He remarked to another officer, "By Jove ! that man will get shot if he isn't careful." "No sooner had I said the word," he writes, "when a bullet splattered near his head. Then another between his legs. I saw the mud fly where the bullet struck. The man, who is the Captain's servant, turned round in the direction of the sniper and roared, 'Good shot, Kaiser. Only you might have hit me, though, for then I could have gone home.' After this the orderly proceeded to roast a fowl, singing quite unconcernedly, 'I often sigh for the silvery moon.' Another bullet came and hit him in the arm. He roared with delight ; and, as he basted the fowl, exclaimed, 'Oh, I'm not going to lave you, me poor bird.' The officer shouted to him to come

into the dug-out. He did so, but when he had licked the wound in his arm and bound it up, he said he must get the fowl, or it would be overdone; and before the officer could utter a word of protest, he ran across the road to the fire, started singing again, though the bullets, once more, came whistling past his ear. When he returned to the dug-out with the fowl nicely roasted he remarked cheerily, ‘People may say what they like, but them Germans are some marksmen, after all.’”

The whimsical side of Irish daring is further illustrated by a story of some men of the Royal Munster Fusiliers. To while away the time in the trenches one night they made bets on doing this or that. One fellow wagered a day's pay that he would go over to the German lines and come back with a maxim gun, which was known to be stationed at a particular point. In the darkness he wriggled across the intervening space on his stomach, and, coming stealthily upon the guard, stabbed him with a dagger. Then slinging the maxim across his shoulder, he crawled safely back to the trenches. “Double pay to-day!” he cried to the comrade he made the bet with. “But you haven't won,” said the other. “Where's the machine's belt and ammunition?” The next night he sallied forth on his belly again, and returned with the complete outfit. The spirit of the anecdote is true to the Irish temperament, though the episode it records may be fanciful. There is no doubt that things of the kind are done very frequently by Irish soldiers. They call it “gallivanting”; and the mood takes on an air of, say, recklessness which, at times, seems very incongruous against the frightful background of the war.

The very root of courage is forgetfulness of self. Self-consciousness is, in no great degree, an Irish failing, or virtue, either, if it is to be regarded as such.

Especially when he is absorbed in a martial adventure, the Irishman has no room in his mind left for a thought of being afraid, or even nervous. He likes the thrill of movement, the fierce excitement of advancing under fire for a frontal attack on the enemy, the ferocity of a contest at close grips. This is the temperament that responds blithely to the whistle—"Over the parapets!" His blood is stirred when the actual fighting begins, and as it progresses he is carried more and more out of himself. The part of warfare repugnant to him, most trying to his temper, is that of long watching and waiting. For the work of lining the trenches a different kind of courage is required. The slush, the miseries, the herding together, the cramped movements, are enough to drive all the heat out of the blood. The qualities needed for the severe and incessant strain of this duty are an immovable calm, a tireless patience, an endurance which no hardships can break down. Here the English and the Scottish shine, for by nature they are more disciplined, more submissive to authority, and they hold on to the end with an admirable blend of good-humour and doggedness. On the other hand, I am told, on the authority of an officer of the Welsh Guards, that when the Irish Guards are in the trenches they find the long dreary vigil and the boredom of inaction so insupportable that it is a common thing for parties of them to go to the officer in command and say, "Please, sir, may we go out and bomb the Germans?"

As Lord Wolseley had "the Irish drop in him," perhaps it is not to be wondered at that he discounts the old proverb that the better part of valour is discretion. "There are a great many men," he writes, "who pride themselves upon simply doing their duty and restricting themselves exclusively to its simple performance. If such a spirit took possession of an

army no great deeds can ever be expected from it." What more can one do, it may be asked, than one's duty? Evidently Lord Wolseley would have duty on the battlefield spiced or gingered with audacity. The way the Irish look at it is well illustrated, I think, in a letter which I have seen from a private in a Devon regiment. He states that while he and some comrades were at an observation post in a trench near the enemy's line six Germans advanced close to them, and though they kept firing at them they could not drive them back. "Two fellows of the Royal Irish Rifles came up," continues the Devon man, "and asked us what was on. We told them. Then one turned round to the other and said, 'Come on, Jim, sure we'll shift them.' Then the two of them fixed their bayonets and rushed at the Germans. You would have laughed to see the six Germans running away from the two Irishmen." We have here an exhibition of the spirit of the born fighter who does not stop to count the odds or risks too cautiously. The incident recalls, in a sense, the scene depicted by Shakespeare in *King Henry V* at the camp before Harfleur, France, when Fluellen the Welshman—all shilly-shallying and dilly-dallying in enterprise—wants to argue with Captain Macmorris, the Irishman, concerning the disciplines of war. But the Irishman wants not words but work. Away with procrastination! So he bursts out, in Shakespeare's most uncouth imitation of the brogue—

" It is no time to discourse, so Chrish save me : the day is hot, and the weather, and the wars and the King, and the dukes : it is no time to discourse. The town is beseeched, and the trumpet call us to the breach, and we talk, and, be Chrish, do nothing ; 'tis shame for us all : so God sa' me 'tis shame to stand still ; it is shame by my hand ; and there is throats to be cut, and works to be done ; and there isn't nothing done, so Chrish sa' me, la ! "

Lord Wolseley also lays greater store on the spontaneous courage of the blood, the intuitive or unconscious form of courage, which is peculiarly Irish, than on moral courage, the courage of the mind, the courage of the man who by sheer will-power masters his nervous system and the shrinking from danger which it usually excites. In Lord Wolseley's opinion the man who is physically brave—the man of whom it may often be said that he has no sense of fear because he has no perception of danger—is the true military leader who draws his men after him to the achievement of deeds at which the world wonders.

That is the kind of courage which of old led the mailed knight, bent on a deed of derring-do, to cleave his way with sword or battle-axe to the very heart of the enemy's phalanx for the purpose of bringing their banner to the ground, or dealing them a more vital blow by slaying their commander. There may be little opportunity in trench warfare and in duels between heavy guns, both sides concealed behind the veils of distance, for such a show of spectacular bravery. War is no longer an adventure, a game or a sport. It is a state of existence, and what is needed most for its successful prosecution, so far as the individual fighter is concerned, is a devotion to duty which, however undramatic, never quails before any task to which it is set.

But the Irish soldier still longs for the struggle to the death between man and man, or, better still, of one man against a host of men. At dawn one day a young Irish soldier, inexperienced and of a romantic disposition, took his first turn in the trenches. He had come up filled with an uplifting resolve to do great things. The Germans immediately began a bombardment. The lad at first was filled with vague wonderments. He was puzzled especially by the emptiness of the battlefield. He had in mind the

opposing armies moving in sight of each other, as he had seen them in manoeuvres. Where was the enemy? Whence came these shells? Then the invisibility of the foe, and this mechanical, impersonal form of fighting appalled him. One of his comrades was blown to pieces by his side. A dozen others disappeared from view in an upheaval of the ground. This was a dastardly massacre and not manly warfare, thought the youth.

He could stand the ordeal no longer. He ran, bewildered, up the trench, shouting "Police! police!" "Hello, there; what are you up to?" said an officer, barring the way. "Oh, sir," cried the young soldier, "there's bloody murder going on down there below, and I am looking for the police to put an end to it."

## CHAPTER VI

### WITH THE TYNESIDE IRISH

#### OVER THE HEIGHTS OF LA BOISELLE, THROUGH BAILIFF'S WOOD TO CONTALMAISON

THE men of the Tyneside Irish battalions stood to arms in the assembly trenches by the Somme on the morning of July 1, 1916. Suddenly the face of the country was altered, in their sight, as if by a frightful convulsion of Nature. Their ears were stunned by shattering explosions, and looking ahead, they saw the earth in two places upheaving, hundreds of feet high, in black masses of smoke. The ground rumbled under their feet, so that many feared it would break apart and bring the parapets down on top of them. Two mines had been sprung beneath the first line of the German trenches to the south-west and north-east of the heap of masonry and timber that once had been the pretty little hamlet of La Boiselle. It was the signal to the Division, which included the Tyneside Irish, that the hour of battle had come.

The part in the general British advance allotted to the Division was first to seize the heights on which La Boiselle stood. This was a few miles beyond the town of Albert, held by the Allies, on the main road to the town of Bapaume, in the possession of the Germans. Thence they were to move forward to Bailiff's Wood, to the north-west of Contalmaison, and to a position on the cross-roads to the north-east of that

village. Contalmaison lay about four miles distant, almost in ruins amid its devastated orchards, and with the broken towers of its chateau standing out conspicuously at the back. One brigade had to take the first line of German trenches, other battalions of the Division had to take the second and third lines, after which the Tyneside Irish were to push on over all these lines to the farthest point of the Brigade's objective, the second ridge on which Contalmaison stood, where they were to dig themselves in and remain.

The Tyneside Irish had already had their baptism of fire, and had proved themselves not unworthy of the race from which they have sprung. Captain Davey—formerly editor of the *Ulster Guardian* (a Radical and Home Rule journal)—records a stirring incident of St. Patrick's Day, 1916. On the night of March 15–16 a German patrol planted a German flag in front of the Tyneside Irish, half-way across "No Man's Land." It was determined to wipe out the insult. During the day snipers were allowed to amuse themselves firing at the flag, and it was not long before a lucky shot smashed the staff in two, and left the German ensign trailing in the dust. But the real work was reserved for the night. There were abundance of volunteers, but Captain Davey, with pride in his own province, selected an Ulsterman for the adventure. The man chosen was Second-Lieutenant C. J. Ervine, of Belfast. Mr. Ervine, supported by two Tyneside Irishmen, set out on the eve of St. Patrick's Day, and entered the gloomy depths of "No Man's Land." An hour passed and they returned—but without the flag. The enemy was too keenly on the alert. But in the early hours of St. Patrick's Day Lieutenant Ervine set off again—this time by himself. What happened is thus described by Captain Davey—

" For an hour and a half we waited for his return, expecting each minute to hear the confounded patrol and machine-gun making the familiar declaration that ' We will not have it.' So keen were the sentries that even when relieved they would not leave their posts. After an hour had passed, Mr. Ervine's sergeant, getting impatient, went over the parapet and crawled to our wire so as to see better. Punctually at a quarter to three a German star-light went up, and by it we could see a dark form making in our direction. In five minutes it reached our wire, and in ten it was over the parapet. The Germans had been caught napping. In less than half an hour, while the spoiler of the Huns stood by in the crude garb of a Highlander in trench boots—for he had fallen into a ditch full of water on the way and we bring no change of clothing to the trenches—another officer and myself had erected a flagstaff in a firing-bay and nailed to it was the German ensign, while ABOVE it floated a green flag with the harp which had been presented to our company before we left home. And so we ushered in St. Patrick's Day !"

Captain Davey proceeds—

" Proudly the green banner floated out, while, of course, we flattered ourselves that the black, white and red of Prussia hung its head in shame below. It was not long before the Germans showed that they were wide awake at last, and the bullets began to sing about our newly-erected monument to Ireland and Ireland's patron saint. But it was a stout flagstaff, and though dozens of bullets struck it, nothing short of a shell could have shifted it. And there it stood all day with the Green above the Black, White and Red. It was no longer a case of ' Deutschland ' but of ' Ireland Uber Alles.' I don't know if any similar sight has been seen in a British trench. I know the green flag has led Irish troops to victory in this war, but I think this is the first time the spectacle has been seen of the Irish ensign hoisted above a captured German flag. At any rate the spectacle was sufficiently novel to cause us to have admiring visitors all day long from other parts of the line."

Unfortunately there is a sad pendant to this story of St. Patrick's Day at the Front. Lieutenant Ervine, the gallant hero of the exploit, died from wounds.

The country which faced the Tyneside Irish on July 1,

1916, had been an agricultural country, inhabited by peasant cultivators before the war. The ravages of war had turned it into a barren waste. The productive soil was completely swept away. Nothing remained but the raw, elemental chalk. It was bare of vegetation, save where, in isolated spots, the hemlock, the thistle, and other gross weeds, proclaimed the rankness of the ground, and also that the processes of Nature ever go on unchecked, even in a world convulsed by human hate. Not only were the villages pounded into rubbish by gun-fire, but the woods—also numerous in these parts—appeared, as seen from a distance, to be but mere clusters of gaunt and splintered tree stumps devoid of foliage. Not a human being was to be seen. Yet that apparently empty waste was infested with men—men turned into burrowing animals like the badger, or, still more, like the weasel, so noted for its ferocious and bloodthirsty disposition. In every shattered wood, in every battered hamlet, in all the slopes and dips by which the face of the country was diversified, they lie concealed, tens of thousands of them, in an elaborately and cunningly contrived system of underground defences, armed with rifles, bombs, machine-guns, trench-mortars, and ready to spring out, with all their claws and teeth displayed, on the approach of their prey, the man in khaki. But, as things turned out, the man in khaki pared the nails of Fritz, and broke his jawbone.

"Before starting, and when our guns were at their heaviest, there was a good deal of movement, up and down, and talking in the trenches. A running fire of chaff was kept up, and there was many a smart reply, for Irish wit will out even in the face of death," said Lieutenant James Hately, who was wounded in that battle. "Some of the fellows were very quiet, but none the less determined. Most of us were laughing. At the same time I felt sorry, for the thought would

obtrude itself on my mind that many of the poor chaps I saw around me would never see home again. As for myself, curiously enough, it never occurred to me that I would even be hit. Perhaps that was because I am of a sanguine or optimistic disposition. I started off, like many another officer, with a cigarette well alight. Many of the men were puffing at their pipes. Officers and men exchanged 'good-lucks,' 'cheer-ohs' and other expressions of comradeship and encouragement."

Many were, naturally, in a serious mood. They felt too near to death for the chaff of the billets or trenches to be seemly. They thought of home, of dear ones, of life in the workshops and offices of Newcastle and Sunderland, and the gay companions of favourite sports and amusements, and, more poignant still, some recalled the last sight of the cabin in Donegal, before turning down the lane to the valley and the distant station, on their way to try their fortune in England. Thus there was some restlessness and anxiety, but the company officers in closest touch with the men agree that the general mood was eagerness to get into grips with the enemy, and relish for the adventure, without any great concern as to its results to themselves individually. When the command was given, "up and over," the Brigade, in fact, was like a huge electric battery fresh from a generating station, for its immense driving force and not less for the lively agitation of its varied emotions. Up and over the battalions went, and moved forward in successive waves, the men in single file abreast, the lines about fifty yards apart. For about two hundred yards or so nothing of moment happened. Then they came under heavy fire. Shells burst about them, shrapnel fell from above, bullets from rifle and machine-gun tore through the air, or caused hundreds of little spurts of earth to leap and dance about their feet. One of

the men told me that the shrieking and hissing of these deadly missiles reminded him of banshees and serpents, a confused and grotesque association appropriate to a battlefield as to a nightmare.

It must not be supposed that everything was carried with a rush and a shout, at point of the bayonet. An impetuous advance is what the men would have liked best. It would be most in tune with the ardour of their feelings, and less a strain on their nerves. But there were many reasons why that was impossible. The country, in its natural formation, was upward sloping, and all dips and swells. It was broken up into enormous shell-holes and mine-craters, seamed with zigzag lines of white chalky rubble marking the German trenches, and strewn with the wire of demolished entanglements, fallen trees and the wreckage of houses. The men were heavily equipped in what is called fighting order. They carried haversacks, water-bottles, gas-helmets, bandoliers filled with cartridges, as well as rifles and bayonets. Some were additionally burdened with bombs and hand grenades. Behind them came the working parties with entrenching tools, such as picks and shovels. Accordingly, the physical labour of the advance alone was tremendous. It would have been stiff and toilsome work for the strongest and most active, even if there had been no storm of shot and shell to face besides. There was, furthermore, the danger in a too hasty progress of plunging headlong into the curtain of high explosives which the artillery, firing from miles behind, hung along the front of the infantry, lifting it and moving it forward as the lines were seen to advance.

Nevertheless the men went on steadily, undaunted by the fire and tumult; and the shuddering earth; undaunted even by the spectacle of the dead and dying of the battalions which preceded them in the attack; shaken only by one horror—a horror unspeakable—

that of seeing fond comrades of their own falling bereft of life, as in a flash, by a bullet through the brain or heart; or, worse still, just as suddenly disappearing into bloody fragments amid the roar and smoke of a bursting shell. Now and then men stopped awhile, trembling at the sight and aghast; and, under the sway of impulses that were irresistible, put their right hands over their faces as a protection to their eyes—an appeal, expressed in action rather than in words, that they might be mercifully spared their sight—or else made a sweeping gesture of the arm, as if to brush aside the bullets which buzzed about them like venomous insects.

The pace, therefore, was necessarily slow. It was rather a succession of short rushes, a few yards at a time, with intervening pauses behind such shelter as was available in order to recover breath. The right soldierly quality is not to be over rash, but to adapt oneself to the nature of the fighting and its scene; the circumstances of the moment, the ever-varying requirements of the action. Such an advance, whatever precautions be taken, entails great sacrifices. Every life that is lost should be made to go as far as possible in the gaining of the victory. Foolhardy movements, due to unreflecting bravery, were accordingly discouraged. Advantage was to be taken of any cover afforded by the natural features of the country or the state into which it had been transformed by the pounding of high explosives. The influence of the officers, so cool and alert were they, so suggestive of capability in direction, was most reassuring and stimulating to the men. On the other hand, the officers were relieved by the intelligence, the amenable character of the men and their fine discipline, from the worry and annoyance which company commanders have so often to endure in the course of an action by the casual doings, and the lack of initiative on the

part of those under their charge. Simple, biddable, gallant and faithful unto death, it was the wish of the Tyneside Irish that, if they were to fall, their bodies might be found, not in the line of the advance, but at the German positions to the north-west of Contal-maison, out of both of which they had helped to drive the enemy.

But now the lines or waves of men which had left the trenches in extended formation were broken up into separate little bodies, all independently engaged in various grim tasks. They had mounted La Boiselle hill, and moved down into the valley which still intervened between them and Bailiff's Wood and Contal-maison. Thus they were in the very centre of the labyrinth of the enemy's system of defences. An air of intolerable mystery and sinister hidden danger hung over it. Was it not possible that those brutes, those dirty fighters, the inventors of poisonous gas, liquid fire and flame jets, who had established themselves in the very vitals of the place, might not have other devilish inventions prepared for the wholesale massacre of their adversaries? The thought arose in the minds of many, and caused a vague sense of apprehension. The Germans, however, had no further hellish surprises. Even so, the place was baneful and noxious enough. The Germans had suffered terrible losses and were morally shaken by the artillery bombardment—gigantic, devastating, thunderous—which preceded the British advance. It is the fact, nevertheless, that most of the survivors had enough courage and tenacity left doggedly to contest every inch of the way. They lay concealed in all sorts of cunning traps and contrivances, apart from their demolished trenches. Machinery on the side of the British—in the form of big guns—had done its part. The time had come for the play of human qualities, the pluck, the endurance and the stout arm of the

British infantry man. Snipers had to be dislodged from their burrows; hidden machine-gun posts had likewise to be found out and silenced. So the men of the Tyneside Irish were rushing about in small parties, shooting, bayoneting, clubbing, bombing ; and the triumphant yells which arose here and there proclaimed the discovery of yet another lair of the foe.

Many a stirring story of personal adventure could be told. Sergeant Knapp of Sunderland, who won his stripes in the advance, gives this account of his experiences—

" I had just taken the machine-gun off my mate to give him a rest when ' Fritz ' opened fire on us from the left with a machine-gun, which played havoc with the Irish. Then I heard my mate shout, ' Bill, I've been hit,' and when I looked round I saw I was by myself; he, poor chap, had fallen like the rest. Now I had to do the best I could, so I picked up a bag of ammunition for the gun and started across ' No Man's Land.' Once I had to drop into a shell-hole to take cover from machine-gun fire.

" After a short rest I pushed on again and got into the German second line. By this time I was exhausted, for I was carrying a machine-gun and 300 rounds of ammunition, besides a rifle and 120 rounds in my pouches, equipment, haversack and waterproof cape, so I had a fair load. I stopped there for a few minutes picking off stray Boches that were kicking about. Then along came a chap, whom I asked to give me a help with the gun, which he did. We had scarcely gone ten yards when a shell burst on top of us. I stood still, I don't think I could have moved had I wanted to. Then I looked around for my chum, but alas ! man and gun were missing. Where he went to I don't know, for I have not seen him or my precious weapon since."

Who that has talked with many wounded soldiers has not found that often they are unable to give any coherent account of their own actions and feelings during a battle. In some cases it is due to an unwillingness to revive haunting memories, a wish to banish out of mind for ever the morbid, terrible and

grotesque, the ugly aspects in which many experiences in battle present themselves, surpassing the nightmares of any opium eater. In other cases there is an obvious distaste for posing. All one gallant Irish Tynesider would say to me was, "Sure I only went on because I had to. Didn't the officers tell us before we left the trenches that there was to be no going back?" He brushed aside everything he had done that terrible day which got him the Distinguished Conduct Medal, with the jocose assumption that he was but the most unheroic of mortals, that he went to a place where he would not have gone if he had had any choice in the matter. The incommunicativeness of the soldier is also due to the fact that he cannot recall his sensations. During an engagement his mind is in a whirl. He has no disposition to note his thoughts and feelings in the midst of the fighting. In fact, few men can analyse the processes of their emotions in such a situation, either at the time or afterwards. As a rule, an overmastering passion possesses the soldier to stab, hack and annihilate the foe who want to take that life which he so greatly desires to preserve. All else is confused and blurred —a vague sense of desperate happenings shrouded in fire and smoke, out of which there emerges, now and then, with sharp distinctness, some specially horrible incident, such as the shattering of a comrade into bits.

But I have met with cases still more strange, where the mind was a blank during the advance through the showering bullets and shrapnel and the exploding shells. Even the simplest process of the brain—memory, or self-consciousness—was dormant. The soldiers in this mental condition appear to have been like the somnambulist who does things mechanically as he walks in his sleep, and when aroused has an impression of having passed through some unusual experience, but what he cannot tell, so vague and

formless is it all. Suddenly all the senses of these hypnotised soldiers became wide awake and alert. This happened when they caught sight of figures in skirted grey tunics and flat grey caps with narrow red bands, emerging from cavernous depths into the light of day, or unexpectedly came upon them crouching in holes or behind mounds of earth away from the trenches. Germans! Face to face with the Bosche at last! The effect was like that of a sudden and peremptory blast of a bugle in a deep stillness. Each Irish Tynesider braced up his nerves for bloody deeds. "My life, or theirs," was the thought that sprang to his mind. Thus it was a scene of appalling violence. It resounded with the clash of bayonets; the crackle of musketry; the explosion of bombs; the rattle of machine-guns; and in that confusion of hideous mechanical noises were also heard the shriek of human anguish and the cry of victory.

It was in a wood not far off Contalmaison that the fighting was most desperate and sanguinary of all. The place was full of Germans. The paths and glades were blocked or barricaded with fallen trees. Beneath the splintered and blackened trunks that were still standing, the undergrowth, freed from the attentions of the woodman in the two years of the war, was dense and tangled. Right through the wood were trenches with barbed wire obstructions. At its upper end were peculiarly strong outposts, which poured machine-gun fire through the trees and bushes. It was commanded by batteries on two sides—from Contalmaison on the right and Oviliers on the left. The attackers had to penetrate this dreadful wood, scrambling, tearing, jumping, creeping in the sultry and stifling heat of the day. There were ferocious personal encounters. The form of fighting was one of the most terrible to which this most hideous of wars has given rise. Probably there has been nothing

like it since early man fought those horrid and extinct mammoth animals, the skeletons of which are now to be seen in museums, what time they were alive and savage and ruthless in their haunts in the primeval forest.

The battle was marked by ever-varying vicissitudes of advance and repulse. "The German Guardsmen fought like tigers to hold it," is a phrase in one letter of an Irish Tynesider. Our own official despatches relating to the Somme battle also show that this part of the German front—Oviliers, La Boiselle, Bailiff's Wood, Contalmaison, Mametz Wood—was held by battalions of the Guards, composed of the flower of the youth of Prussia, and standing highest in the mightiest army in the world. These were not the kind of men to put up their hands and cry "Kamerad, mercy!" at the sight even of that pitiless and unnerving thing—a bayonet at the end of a rifle in the hands of a brawny Irishman, with the fury of battle flaming in his eyes. They held on tenaciously, and gave blow for blow. A long bombardment, night and day, by modern heavy guns, is a frightful ordeal. Its objects are, first, to kill wholesale; and, next, to paralyse the survivors with the fear of death, so that they could but offer only a feeble resistance to the advancing troops. Shaken and despairing men were, therefore, encountered—filthy, unshaven, vile-looking, and so mentally dazed as to act and talk like idiots. But they were not all like that. So well-designed and powerful were their subterranean defences that large numbers were unaffected by the visitations of the high explosives, and through it preserved their courage and their rage. Conspicuous among these were the Prussian Guards. They made furious efforts to stop the advancing lines of the Tyneside Irish, and that they were overpowered is a splendid testimony to the martial qualities of our men. Think of it! Two years

ago, or so, these young lads of various industrial callings—farm hands, railway porters, clerks, drapers' assistants, policemen, carters, messenger boys, miners—would have regarded as preposterous the idea that at any time of what seemed to them to be their pre-destined humdrum existence, or in any period even of a conceivably mad and topsy-turvy world, they would not only be soldiers but would encounter the Germans on the fields of France; and—most incredible phantasy of all—defeat the renowned Prussian Guards—men whose hearts from their earliest years throbbed high at the thought that they were to be soldiers; men highly disciplined and trained, belonging to the proudest regiments in the German Army, and always ready and eager for the call of battle.

Bailiff's Wood and Contalmaison appear to have been the furthest points reached on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. If they did not then fall, the superb action of the Tyneside Irish made breaches in these strongholds which, when widened and deepened by subsequent assaults, led to their complete capture on July 10. As Captain Downey, an officer of the Tyneside Irish says: "Our men paved the way for various other British regiments who swept through some days later." A few companies of one of these battalions which got into Contalmaison on July 7, and were driven out, brought back some Tyneside Irish and Scottish that were imprisoned in a German dug-out in the village. They also found outside the village the bodies of several Tyneside Irish, gallant fellows who died in the attempt to push on to the point they had orders to reach.

The effectiveness of the attack by the Brigade on July 1 depended a good deal upon the progress made by troops of other Divisions who were co-operating on both sides. "On our left flank the parallel Division was held up; on our right the Division moved slowly,"

says an officer of the Irish Brigade. The difficulties of the advance would probably have held up indefinitely any other troops in the world. But there is never any danger of the momentum of an attack by Irish troops being weakened through excessive caution against what is called "over running." Indeed, it is a fault of their courage that they are sometimes prone to act with too much precipitation, and, in fact, on this occasion it was not so much that the Divisions to the right and left were behind time as that the Irish Brigade were somewhat ahead of it. The result, however, was that the Irish Tynesiders were exposed on their right to a deadly enfilading fire that swept across from Oviliers, which was not yet in British possession. Nevertheless, they did not stop. "No matter who cannot get on, we must." That was the order of the officers in command, and so dauntless was the response to it that by one o'clock the men got to a point in front of Contalmaison. Here what remained of the Brigade held on for some days and nights, until the reserves came to their relief on July 4.

The casualties among all ranks were heavy. The officers, sharing every hardship and being foremost in every danger, suffered most grievously. "Our Brigadier, our colonels, our company commanders, were badly wounded. Every officer, with the exception of two subalterns, was hit. Some were hit in no less than three places. Yet they carried on. Those too weak to walk crawled until they eventually gave up through loss of blood. The losses among the N.C.O.s were just as large." This is the testimony of Captain Downey. Lieut.-Colonel L. Meredith Howard of the Tyneside Irish was severely wounded, and died two days afterwards. Among the officers of the Brigade who fell in action was Second-Lieutenant Gerald FitzGerald. A brother officer says, "He died shouting to his men: 'Come on.'" His father was Lord Mayor of Newcastle the year in which the

Brigade was raised. Other officers killed were Captain Kenneth Mackenzie of Kinsale, co. Cork, whose father was formerly an Irish Land Commissioner; Lieutenant Louis Francis Byrne of Newcastle, who was serving his articles as a solicitor when war broke out; and Lieutenant J. R. C. Burlureaux, a journalist.

The disappearance of so many of the officers was enough to have dispirited and confused any body of men. Would it be possible for them to extricate themselves from the fearful labyrinth in which they were involved? Would there be any of them left for the final dash at their objective? The non-commis-sioned officers rose splendidly to the emergency. One battalion had not far advanced when all the officers were shot down. Quartermaster-Sergeant Joseph Coleman took command and continued onward. Soon he found himself with only three men left. Everything seemed lost in his part of that scene of tumult and death but for his coolness and gallantry. He went back, gathered up the remnants of other scattered companies, and led a willing and eager band to the capture of the position put down to the battalion in the scheme of operations. For this Coleman got the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and had it pinned on his breast by General Munro, the Brigadier.

When the Brigade was relieved, their return to the haven behind the lines was attended with almost as much danger as their advance to the hell beyond the ridge had been. As the men ascended the slope of La Boiselle, down which they had charged a few days before, the German machine-guns were still rattling from the opposite hill, and snipers were picking off the stragglers. The hideousness of the field of action had also increased. The devastated ground, with its shell-holes, its great gaping craters and its trenches, was now strewn with the unsavoury litter of the wake of battle—discarded rifles, helmets, packs, burst and

unburst shells; boots, rags, meat-tins, bottles and newspapers. Such of the wounded as could walk at all limped along on the arms of comrades. Every one was inconceivably dirty. Down their blackened faces were white furrows made by their sweat. Thus they came back, the Irish Tynesiders, with bloody but unbowed heads. "I saw our battalions file out from their bivouac under cover of night, and, though each man knew of the deadly work before him, the ready jest and witty retort were as abundant as ever," writes Lieutenant F. Treanor, Quartermaster of one of the battalions of the Tyneside Irish, and a native of Monaghan. "In the dressing-stations afterwards I saw many of them, and there were still the same heroic fortitude and the exchange of comments, many grimly humorous, as that of one poor fellow who remarked, when asked if he had any souvenirs. 'Be danged, 'twas no place for picking up jewellery.'"

The Brigade received the highest praises from the Commander of the Army Corps and the Commander of the Division, as well as from their own General. The corps commander wrote: "The gallantry, steadiness and resource of the Brigade were such as to uphold the very highest and best traditions of the British Army." Major-General Ingouville-Williams, who commanded the Division, wrote to the Tyneside committee—

"It is with the greatest pride and deepest regret that I wish to inform you that the Division which included the Tyneside Irish covered itself with glory on July 1, but its losses were very heavy. Every one testifies to the magnificent work they did that day, and it is the admiration of all. I, their commander, will never forget their splendid advance through the German curtain of fire. It was simply wonderful, and they behaved like veterans. Tyneside can well be proud of them; and although they will sorrow for all my brave and faithful comrades, it is some con-

solation to know they died not in vain, and that their attack was of the greatest service to the Army on that day."

Writing to his wife on July 3, 1916, Major-General Ingouville-Williams said : "My Division did glorious deeds. Never have I seen men go through such a hell of a barrage of artillery. They advanced as on parade and never flinched. I cannot speak too highly of them. The Division earned a great record, but, alas ! at a great cost." On July 20 he also wrote to his wife : "Never shall I cease singing the praises of my old Division, and I never shall have the same grand men to deal with again." A few days later Major-General Ingouville-Williams died for his country.

Seventy-three officers and men of the Tyneside Irish received decorations. Four Distinguished Service Orders and twenty Military Crosses went to the officers, eight Distinguished Conduct Medals and forty Military Medals were received by the men, and a sergeant was awarded the high Russian decoration of the Order of St. George. Among the officers who received the Military Cross was Lieutenant T. M. Scanlan, whose father, Mr. John E. Scanlan, Newcastle-on-Tyne, took a prominent part in the raising of the Brigade. Lieutenant Scanlan states that only eight men were left out of his platoon after July 1, and six of them were awarded honours. All honour to the Brigade ! Those who helped to raise the battalions—Mr. Peter Bradley and Mr. N. Grattan Doyle, the chairmen of the committee ; Mr. Gerald Stoney and Mr. John Mulcahy, the joint secretaries—have reason to be proud of the magnificent quality of the men who responded to their call. Let it stand as the last word of the story of their achievement that they overthrew and trampled down the proud Prussian Guards, and relaxed the grip which Germany had held for two years on a part of France.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WEARING OF RELIGIOUS EMBLEMS AT THE FRONT

#### SPREAD OF THE EXAMPLE SET BY IRISH SOLDIERS

"Nearly every man out here is wearing some sort of Catholic medallion or a rosary that has been given him, and he would rather part with his day's rations or his last cigarette than part with his sacred talisman."—Extract from a letter written from the Front by a non-Catholic private in the Hussars.

THE wearing of religious emblems by soldiers of the British Army is much talked of by doctors and nurses in military hospitals in France and at home. When wounded soldiers are undressed—be they non-Catholic or Catholic—the discovery is frequently made of medals or scapulars worn around their necks, or sacred badges stitched inside their tunics. It is a psychological phenomenon of much interest for the light it throws upon human nature in the ordeal of war. It shows, too, how war is a time when supernatural signs and wonders are multiplied.

Testimony to the value of these religious favours as safeguards against danger and stimulants to endurance and heroism was given in a most dramatic manner by Corporal Holmes, V.C., of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who also holds the highest French decoration, the Medaille Militaire. He visited the Catholic schools at Leeds. All the

girls and boys were assembled to see him. One of the nuns told the children how Corporal Holmes won his honours during the retreat from Mons. He carried a disabled comrade out of danger, struggling on with his helpless human burden for three miles under heavy fire. Then taking the place of the driver, who was wounded, he brought a big gun, with terror-stricken horses, out of action, through lines of German infantry and barbed wire entanglements. At the crossing of the Aisne a machine-gun was left behind, as the bridge over which it was hoped to carry it was shelled by the enemy. Corporal Holmes plunged into the river with it, some distance below the bridge, and, amid shot and shell, brought it safely to the other bank. When the nun had finished recounting his deeds, Corporal Holmes unexpectedly turned back his tunic, and saying, "This is what saved me," pointed to his rosary and medal of the Blessed Virgin.

There is the equally frank and positive declaration made by Lance-Corporal Cuddy of the Liverpool Irish (the King's Liverpool Regiment), who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry in saving life after the great battle of Festubert. He was in the trenches with his regiment. Cries for help came from some wounded British soldiers lying about fifteen yards from the German trenches. The appeal smote the pitying heart of Cuddy. He climbed the parapet of his trench, and, crawling forward on his stomach, discovered two disabled men of the Scottish Rifles. One of them had a broken thigh. Cuddy coolly bound up the limb, under incessant fire from the German trenches, and crawled back to his trench, dragging the man with him. Then, setting out to bring in the second man, he was followed by Corporal Dodd of the same battalion, who volunteered to assist him. On the way a bullet struck Dodd on the shoulder and passed out through his leg. Cuddy

bandaged him and carried him safely back. Once more he crawled over the fire-swept ground between the trenches to the second Scottish rifleman. This time he took an oil-sheet with him. He wrapped it round the wounded man and brought him in also. All this was the work of hours. Not for a moment did this brave and simple soul flinch or pause in his humane endeavours. He seemed to be indifferent, or absolutely assured, as to his own fate. And he had the amazing good luck of going through the ordeal scathless, save for a slight wound in the leg. As is the way with soldiers, the comrades of Cuddy joked with him on his success in dodging the bullets of the bloody German snipers. "They were powerless to hit me. I carry the Pope's prayer about me, and I put my faith in that," he answered, in accordance with his simple theology. This prayer of Pope Benedict XV is one "to obtain from the mercy of Almighty God the blessings of Peace."

Both soldiers were convinced, as Catholics, that, being under the special protection of the Heavenly Powers whose symbols they wore, they were safe and invincible until their good work was done. Psalm civ. speaks of God, "who maketh the sweeping winds his angels, and a flaming sword His ministers." Why should He not work also through the agency of the religious emblems of His angels and saints? With this belief strong within them, Holmes and Cuddy leaped at the chance of bringing comfort to comrades in anguish, and help to those sorely pressed by the enemy.

There is another aspect of this question of the psychology of war. It is a boast of the age that we have freed ourselves from what is called the deadening influence of superstition. Nevertheless, since the outbreak of the war there has been an extraordinary revival of the secular belief in omens, witchcraft, in-

cantations and all that they imply—the direct influence of supernatural powers, of some sort or other, on the fortunes of individuals in certain events. One amiable form of it is the enormously increased demand for those jewellers' trinkets called charms and amulets, consisting of figures or symbols in stone and metal which are popularly supposed to possess powers of bringing good fortune or averting evil, and which formerly lovers used to present to each other, and wear attached to bracelets and chains, to ensure mutual constancy, prosperity and happiness. Even the eighteenth-century veneration of a child's caul—the membrane occasionally found round the head of an infant at birth—as a sure preservative against drowning is again rife among those who go down to the sea in ships. The menace of the German submarine has revivified the ancient desire of seafaring folk to possess a caul, which was laid dormant by the sense of security bred by years of freedom from piracy, and the article has gone up greatly in price in shops that sell sailors' requirements at the chief ports. Fortune-tellers, crystal-gazers, and other twentieth-century witches and dealers in incantations, who pretend to be able to look into the future and provide safeguards against misfortune, are being consulted by mothers, wives and sweethearts, anxiously seeking for some safe guidance for their nearest and dearest through the perils of the war.

So far as the Army is concerned, the belief that certain things bring good luck or misfortune has always been widely held by the rank and file. Formerly there were two talismans which were regarded as especially efficacious in warding off evil, and particularly death and disablement in battle. These were, in the infantry, a button off the tunic of a man, and, in the cavalry, the tooth of a horse, in cases where the man and the horse had come scathless

through a campaign. A good many years ago the old words "charm," "talisman," "amulet," dropped out of use in the Army. The French slang word "mascot," which originated with gamblers and is applied to any person, animal or thing which is supposed to be lucky, came into fashion; and some animal or bird—monkey, parrot, or goat, or even the domestic dog or cat—was appointed "the mascot of the regiment." But since the outbreak of the war the Army has returned to its old faith in the old talisman. A special charm designed for soldiers, called "Touchwood," and described as "the wonderful Eastern charm," has had an enormous sale. It was suggested by the custom, when hopes are expressed, of touching wood, so as to placate the fates and avert disappointment, a custom which is supposed to have arisen from the ancient Catholic veneration of the true Cross.

"Touchwood" is a tiny imp, mainly head, made of oak, surmounted by a khaki service cap, and with odd, sparkling eyes, as if always on the alert to see and avert danger. The legs, either in silver or gold, are crossed, and the arms, of the same metal, are lifted to touch the head. The designer, Mr. H. Brandon, states that he has sold 1,250,000 of this charm since the war broke out. Not long ago there was a curious scene in Regent's Park. This was the presentation of "Touchwood" to each of the 1200 officers and men of a battalion of the City of London Regiments (known as "The Cast-Irons") by Mdlle. Delysia, a French music-hall dancer, before they went off for the Front. Never has there been such a public exhibition—uncontrolled and unashamed—of the belief in charms. Mr. Brandon has received numerous letters from soldiers on active service, ascribing their escape from perilous situations to the wearing of the charm. One letter, which has five signatures, says—

" We have been out here for five months fighting in the trenches, and have not had a scratch. We put our great good fortune down to your lucky charm, which we treasure highly."

Thus we see that mankind has not outgrown old superstitions, as so many of us thought, but, on the contrary, is still ready to fly to them for comfort and protection in danger. The truth is that the human mind remains at bottom essentially the same amid all the changes made by time in the superficial crust of things. Man is still the heir of all the ages. Some taint of "the old Popish idolatries" survives in the blood of most of us, no matter how Protestant and rationalistic we may suppose ourselves to be. And now that the foundations of civilisation are disrupted, and humanity is involved in the coils of the most awful calamity that has ever befallen it, is it to be wondered at that hands should be piteously stretched out on all sides, and in all sorts of ways—unorthodox as well as orthodox—groping in the dark for protective touch with the unseen Powers who rule our destinies.

It is in these circumstances that non-Catholic soldiers of the new Armies are turning from materialistic charms to holy emblems. It may be thought that this new cult is but a manifestation, in a slightly different form, of the same primal superstitious instinct of mankind as inspired the old, but as it has a religious origin and sanction and is really touched by spiritual emotion, it seems to me to be far removed from the other in spirit and intention. Non-Catholic soldiers appear to have been led into the new practice by the example of Catholic soldiers. These religious objects, commemorative of the Blessed Virgin and other saints, have always been carried about their persons by Irish Catholic soldiers, to some extent, as well as by Catholics generally in civil life. The custom is now almost universal among Catholic officers and men at

the Front. It resembles, in a way, the still more popular practice of carrying photographs of mother, wife and child. Will it be denied that the soldier, as he looks upon the likenesses of those who cherish him, and hold him ever in their thoughts, does not derive hope and consolation from his consciousness of their watchful and prayerful love?

There are several little breastplates thus worn by Catholics to shield them from spiritual evil and bodily calamity. The chaplet of beads, known as the rosary, is well known. The brown scapular of St. Mary of Mount Carmel is made of small pieces of cloth connected by long strings, and is worn over the shoulders in imitation of the brown habit of the Carmelite friars. Then there are the Medal of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, a reproduction of the wonderful picture discovered by the Redemptorist Order in Rome; and the Miraculous Medal of Our Lady, revealed by the Immaculate Virgin to Catherine Labouré, Sister of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, in Paris. Another is the "Agnus Dei" ("Lamb of God"), a small disc of wax, impressed with the figure of a lamb supporting a cross, and blessed by the Pope, which is the most ancient of the sacramentals, or holy objects worn, used or preserved by Catholics for devotional purposes. But what is now perhaps the most esteemed of all is the Badge of the Sacred Heart. On an oval piece of red cloth is printed a picture of Jesus, standing before a cross, with His bleeding heart, encircled by thorns and flames, exposed on His breast. The badge is emblematical of the sufferings of Jesus for the love of and redemption of mankind. It is the cognisance of a world-wide league, known as the Apostleship of Prayer, conducted by the Society of Jesus, and having, it is said, a membership of 25,000,000 of all nations. The promotion of these special devotions in the Catholic Church has been

assigned to different Orders: such as the rosary to the Dominicans; the scapular to the Carmelites; the Way of the Cross to the Franciscans. So the spread of the devotion of the Sacred Heart is the work of the Jesuits. The headquarters of the Apostleship of Prayer in this country is the house of the Jesuits in Dublin, who publish as its organ a little monthly magazine called *The Messenger*. There has been so enormous a demand for the badge since the war broke out that the Jesuits have circulated a statement emphasising that it is not to be regarded as "a charm or talisman to preserve the wearer from bullets and shrapnel." To wear it in this spirit would, they say, be "mere superstition." "What it stands for and signifies is something far nobler and greater," they also say. "It is, in a sense, the exterior livery or uniform of the soldiers and clients of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, King of heaven and earth, just as the brown scapular is the livery of the servants and soldiers of Mary, heaven's glorious Queen. As such it procures for those who wear it in the proper spirit the grace and protection of God; and the scapulars the special protection of Mary, much more than the livery or uniform of a country procures for those who fight under its flag the help and protection of the nation to which they belong."

What is the attitude of the Irish Catholic soldier towards this religious movement as a means of preservation and grace in the trials and perils of war? I have read many letters from Irish Catholics on service in France, Flanders and the East in which the matter is referred to, and have discussed it with some of those who have been invalided home. All this testimony establishes beyond question that the mystical sense of the Irish nature, which has been developed to a high degree by the two tremendous influences of race and religion, leads the Irish

Catholic soldier profoundly to believe that there is a supernatural interference often with the chances and fortunes of the battlefield in answer to prayers. Michael O'Leary, V.C., a splendid type of the Irish soldier in body and mind, gave a brief but pointed statement of his views on the matter. "A shell has grazed my cheek and blown a comrade by my side to pieces," he said, "though there was no reason, so far as I could see, but the act of God, why the shell should not have knocked my head off and grazed my comrade's cheek."

The average Irish soldier probably knows nothing of the materialistic theory that Nature is a closed system; that the laws of the universe are fixed and immutable; that no wearing of holy objects, and no amount of praying even, will ever disturb their uniform mechanical working; and that the sole reason why any soldier on the battlefield escapes being hit by a bullet or piece of explosive shell is that he was not directly in its line of flight. Such a doctrine would be regarded, at least by the simple and instinctive natures in the Irish ranks, as the limit of blasphemy. Their belief in the reality and power of God is most profound. God is to them still the lord and master of all the forces of Nature; and the turning aside of a bullet or piece of explosive shell would be but the slightest manifestation of His almighty omnipotence. Mystery surrounds the Irish Catholic soldier at all times. His realisation of the unseen is very vivid. The saints and angels are his companions, not the less real and potent because they are not visible to his eyes. But it is on the field of battle that he is most closely enveloped by these spiritual presences. He is convinced that he has but to call upon them, and that, if he be in a state of grace, they will come to his aid as the ministers of God. So he prays that God may protect and save him, and he

wears next his heart the emblems of God's angels and saints. Thus he feels invincible against the powers of darkness in both the spiritual and material worlds. For these devotions have also the effect of putting him in train to receive submissively whatever fate God may will him. He knows that God can safeguard him in the fight if He chooses; and he believes that if God does not chose so to do it is because in His wisdom He does not deem it right. "Blessed be the holy will of God!" The old, familiar Irish ejaculation springs to his lips, that variant of Job's unshakable trust in the Almighty : "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Thus it is that the sight of his comrades lying around him, dead and wounded, who prayed like him and, like him, carried rosary beads or wore the badge of the Sacred Heart, has no effect in shaking his belief in his devotions and his holy emblems. So when the hour of direst peril is at hand he is found not unnerved and incapable of standing the awful test. There is an ancient Gaelic proverb which says : "What is there that seems worse to a man than his death? and yet he does not know but it may be the height of his good luck." Even if death should come, what is it but the shadowy gate which opens into life everlasting and blissful?

There are on record numerous cases of protection and deliverance ascribed by non-Catholics as well as Catholics to the wearing of religious emblems. The Sisters of Mercy, Dungarvon, Waterford, tell the story of the marvellous escape from death of Private Thomas Kelly, Royal Munster Fusiliers, at the first landing on the Gallipoli peninsula on April 25, 1915. Kelly had emerged with his comrades from the *River Clyde*—the steamer which had brought his regiment to the landing-place, Beach V—and was in the water wading towards the shore when this happened to him—

"A bullet struck him, passing through his left hand, which at the moment was placed over his heart. The bullet hit and shattered a shield badge of the Sacred Heart, which was sewn inside his tunic, then glanced aside and passed over his chest, tearing the skin. The mark of its passage across the chest can still be plainly seen. The bullet then passed through the pocket of his tunic at the right-hand side, completely destroying his pay-book. When wounded he fell into the water, where he lay for about two hours under a perfect hurricane of bullets and shrapnel. In all that time, while his companions were falling on every side, he received only one slight flesh wound. He is now in Ireland, loudly proclaiming, to all whom he comes in contact with, his profound gratitude to the Sacred Heart. He is quite recovered from his wounds, and expects soon to be sent to the Front. His trust in the Sacred Heart is unbounded, and he is fully convinced that the Sacred Heart will even work miracles for him, if they are necessary, to bring him safely home again."

Private Edward Sheeran, Royal Irish Rifles, relating his experiences in France, says—

"We were waiting in reserve, and were shelled heavily before the advance. Four of us were lying low in the traverse of a trench. Every time I heard a shell approaching I said, 'O Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!' Just as I was reciting this ejaculation a shell burst in our midst. For a minute I was dazed, and when I surveyed the damage, imagine my surprise to find the man next to me blown to pieces, parts of him over me. Another never moved again to my knowledge, while the remaining one had his arms shattered. As regards myself, my pack was blown off my back, but all the injury I received was a very slight wound in the left shoulder. Thanks to the mercy of the Sacred Heart I was able to rejoin my battalion two days afterwards."

"A very grateful sister," writing to the *Irish Messenger*, in thanksgiving for "a great favour obtained through Our Blessed Lady of Perpetual Succour," states—

"My brother was ordered out to the war and was in the fighting line from the first. I sent him a miraculous medal of Our Blessed Lady and promised publication if he came back

safe. He has been in twelve battles and got nine wounds, none dangerous, only on his hands and one leg badly broken. He was being carried off the field by his comrades and the shells were falling so fast that they had to leave him and fly for their lives. He lay there three hours, bleeding and faint, until he was picked up again, and, thanks to Our Blessed Lady's protection, he is now safe in a London hospital and making a speedy recovery."

The brother of an Irish Catholic nurse in a British military hospital in France writes to the *Irish Messenger*—

"I was speaking lately to my sister, the nurse to whom you sent the parcel of badges, beads, etc. She says if every parcel of badges did as much good as hers has done and is doing, you will have a big reward in eternity. The poor Irish and English Catholic lads in their torments find the greatest comfort in their beads and badges, and put more trust in the Sacred Heart than in surgeons and nurses. One poor man said: 'I know I am dying, but, nurse, write to my poor wife and tell her that my beads and a sip of Holy Water was my consolation. Tell her I put my trust in the Sacred Heart and die confident. Send her this old badge which I wore all through the war.' "

In Ireland there are tens of thousands of Catholic mothers, wives and sisters, ever praying for the safe return of their men from the Front, or else that they be given the grace of a happy death, and there is nothing that tends more to prevent them brooding when the day, the hour, the moment may come with a dread announcement from the War Office, than the consoling thought that these dear ones are faithful in all the dangers and emergencies of their life to the practices of their religion. That is why Private Michael O'Reilly, of the Connaught Rangers in France, writes to his mother: "I have the Sacred Heart badge on my coat and three medals, a pair of rosary beads and father's Agnus Dei around my neck, so you see I am well guarded, and you have nothing

at all to fear so far as I am concerned." Even for the mother, death loses its sting when she gets news of her son which leaves her in no doubt as to his soul's eternal welfare. Here is a characteristic specimen of many letters from bereaved but comforted mothers which have been printed in *The Messenger*—

"DEAR REV. FATHER,—I beg to appeal to you for my dear good son who was killed in action on the 25th of March, and who died a most holy death. I have heard from Father Gleeson that he died with his rosary beads round his neck and reciting his rosary. He got a gunshot wound in the head and lived several hours after receiving the wound. I know perfectly well that it was owing to his having St. Joseph's Cord about him that he got such a happy death and had the happiness of receiving his Easter duty on Sunday the 21st. He also had the Sacred Heart Badge, a crucifix, and his Blue and Brown Scapulars on him, so that I am content about the way he died. He is buried in Bethune cemetery. I am a subscriber to *The Messenger*, and my son was in the Apostleship of Prayer and used to get the leaflets in his young days at the school he was going to, taught by the Christian Brothers. He was twenty-one years and seven months the day of his sad death. He belonged to the Royal Munster Fusiliers."

Some people, no doubt, will smile indulgently or mockingly—according to their natures—at what appears to them to be curious instances of human credulity. Others will cry out in angry protest against "Popish trumperies"; "idolatrous practices"; "fetishism." No religion can be truly understood from the outside. It must be lived in, within, to be apprehended. But surely those who are not altogether cursed with imperfect sympathies—those, at least, who take pleasure in the happy state of others, will shout aloud in joy to know that there is something left—no matter what—to sustain and console in this most terrible time of youth's agony and motherhood's lacerated heart.

It must not be supposed that the religious practices of the Irish Catholic troops are confined to the wearing

of scapulars, medals and Agnus Deis. There are among them, of course, many who attribute all kinds of phenomena to natural rather than to miraculous causes. By them, also, beads, medals and scapulars are venerated, and proudly displayed over their tunics—often, too, rosary beads are to be seen twisted round rifle barrels—as outward symbols of the spirit of their religion, as aids to worship, as bringing more vividly before them the God they adore and the saints whose aid they invoke. But their faith gives, in addition, to the Catholic troops the Mass, which is celebrated by the Army chaplains up at the Front in wrecked houses or on the open, desolate fields, and attended by many hundreds of men in silent and intent worship, the sacraments of Confession and Communion, and makes possible that solemn spectacle of the priest administering the General Absolution, or forgiveness of sin, to a whole battalion, standing before him with bared and bowed heads, before going into action. All these religious scenes have greatly impressed non-Catholic soldiers. They wonder at the consolation and inspiration which Catholic comrades derive from their services and their symbols. They feel the loneliness and the dread of things. They are impressed by the number of wayside shrines, with Crucifixes and Madonnas, which have survived the ravages of war. In their hearts they crave for spiritual companionship and help which the guns thundering behind them cannot give any more than the guns thundering in front; and they, too, put out their hands to grasp the supernatural presences, unseen but so acutely felt in the shadowy arena of war. If there was scoffing at a praying soldier in barracks, there is respect for him in the trenches. Non-Catholics join in the prayers that are said by Catholics. "Plenty of shells were fired at our trenches, but, thank God, no harm was done," writes an Irish soldier. "When the shells

came near us we used to pray. Prayers are like a double parapet to them, I think. Yesterday we were reciting the Litany of the Sacred Heart while the shells were annoying us. I was reading the beautiful praises and titles of the Litany, and both my Protestant and Catholic mates were answering me with great fervour. I was just saying 'Heart of Jesus, delight of all the Saints, succour us,' when one shell hit our trench and never burst, and, furthermore, no shell came near us after that, for our opponents directed their attention elsewhere for the rest of the day." He adds that every night in the trenches the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin was recited; and the responses were given by non-Catholics as well as by Catholics.

In like manner, non-Catholic soldiers are being weaned from the use of pagan charms and talismans, and are taking instead to the Catholic substitutes which have been blessed by the priest making over them the sign of the cross. Father Plater stated at a meeting of the Westminster Catholic Federation that, travelling in the south of England, he met in the train some soldiers of the Ulster Division, all Orangemen, and instead of consigning the holy father to other realms, as they probably would have done in other times and other circumstances, they actually asked him to bless their miraculous medals. There is an ever-increasing desire among them for medals, rosaries, and for holy pictures, such as the little prints of saints and angels which Catholics carry in their prayer-books. At the convents in London where the Badge of the Sacred Heart is to be had, Protestant soldiers are constantly calling to get it, and they tell stories which they had heard of wonderful escapes by those who wore it. One nun told me they cannot keep the supply abreast of the demand. For instance, she said that on the day I saw her a private of the

Royal Welsh Fusiliers got fifty badges for distribution in the regiment.

Religious emblems have a warmth and intimacy about them which secular charms lack. They are regarded as representing real spiritual beings, saints and angels. Secular charms, on the other hand, are devoid of association with any potentate or power known or believed to exist in the other world, and seem still to possess something of the mingled simplicity and grossness of the first dawning of superstition on the mind of the savage. The curiosity and interest of the non-Catholic soldier in these religious symbols being thus excited, the moment he handles one and examines its design, he feels a pleasant sensation of help and comfort, and a consequent increase in his vitality. He highly treasures his holy talisman. Should he pass unscathed through the constant yet capricious menace of an engagement, he ascribes his luck to supernatural protection. As the English troops were passing through Hornu, near Mons, a young Belgian lady took a rosary from her neck and gave it to Private Eves of the West Riding Regiment, telling him to wear it as a protection against the bullets of the Germans. Eves, a non-Catholic Northumbrian, wore the rosary during the battle of Mons. "The air was thick with shells and machine-gun bullets," he says, "and how I escaped I don't know. A shell burst close to me. A piece of it struck my ammunition band and bent five cartridges out of shape; but I escaped with only a bruise on the chest. I always say this rosary had something to do with it."

Many stories of the like might be told. A driver of the Royal Field Artillery says: "I think I owe all my luck to a mascot which I carry in my knapsack. It is a beautiful crucifix, given me by a Frenchwoman for helping her out of danger. It is silver, enamel

and marble, and she made me take it." Private David Bulmer of the Royal Engineers, an Ulster Presbyterian, returned home on furlough to his parents at Killeshandra, wearing a rosary. He declared it was the beads that saved his life on the battlefield, as he was the only man left in his company. Sapper Clifford Perry has written to a Cardiff friend: "Rosaries are very popular here. I think I can safely say that four out of every ten men one meets wear them around their necks. Strange to say, they are not all Catholics. Those who are not Catholics do not wear them as curios or ornaments either, as upon cases of inquiry they attach some religious value to them even though they cannot explain what it is. Still, no one could convince them to part with them." Often the emblems and badges worn by non-Catholic soldiers are gifts from Catholic wives and children concerned for their spiritual and temporal well-being. "An Irish mother who trusts in the Sacred Heart" writes from Kensington in acknowledgment of the "wonderful escape" of her husband. "He had only gone out from a stable when a German shell knocked the roof in, killing his two horses, and also killing one man and wounding five others. My husband, who is a Protestant, is wearing a Sacred Heart Badge and the Cross belonging to my rosary. He has been saved during many battles from the most awful dangers, having been fighting regularly since September 1914." Father Peal, S.J., of the Connaught Rangers serving in France, relating some of his experiences as a chaplain after a battle, says: "It was very solemn, creeping in and out among the wounded, finding who were Catholics. Some could not speak, others just able to whisper. One poor man lay on his face, with a hole in his back. He was actually breathing through this hole. I felt round his neck for his identification disc and found he had a medal

and Agnus Dei. I naturally thought he was a Catholic, but he whispered to me, 'Missus and the children did that.' We repeated an act of contrition, and I gave him conditional absolution." So it has come to pass that rosaries, which were formerly a monopoly of the religious repositories in French towns and villages, may now be seen displayed in every shop window, so great is the demand for them, and that "The League of the Standard of the Cross"—an Anglican society—has, up to the end of 1916, sent out over 10,000 crucifixes to Protestant soldiers.

The wearing of Catholic emblems by the rank and file is encouraged by many officers who understand human nature, and make allowance for what some of them, no doubt, would call its inherent weaknesses. The practice has been proved to have on conduct a profound influence for good. It seems to incite and fortify the soldiers' courage. Man's will and resolution often prove to be weak and fickle things, especially on the field of battle, where they are put to the sternest and most searching of tests. Fear of death, which, after all, is but a manifestation of the primal instinct of self-preservation, often militates against the efficiency of the soldier. It disorganises his understanding; it paralyses his power to carry out orders. The elimination of fear, or its control, is therefore part of the training of the soldier. How fortunate, then, is the soldier who can find such tranquillity in battle that he has passed beyond the fear of death. Psychologists tell us, such is the influence of the body upon the mind, that whether a man shall act the hero or the coward in an emergency depends largely on his physical condition at the time. The body of the soldier must, as far as possible, be made subordinate to his mind. Religious sensibility and emotion, in whatever form it may manifest itself, tends to the exaltation of the mental mood; and as good officers

know they cannot afford to neglect any means which promises to steady their men, calm them and give them confidence in action or under fire, they have enlisted this tremendous force on their side by favouring and promoting the Catholic custom of wearing holy objects.

A nun writing from a convent in South London says: "The colonel at — sent twenty-two medals to Father X— to be blessed. The Father took the medals to the barracks himself, where the colonel informed him that he wanted them for Protestant officers who were going to France." The girls of the Notre Dame Convent School, Glasgow, sent a parcel of 1200 medals to a Scottish regiment. They received a letter of thanks from one of the officers, in which he says: "You will be glad to know that most, if not all the men, Protestants though they be, have put your medals on the cord to which their identity discs are tied, so that Our Lady may help them."

Thus is the wearing of scapulars and medals in the Army welcomed as an aid to our arms, a reinforcement of our military power. In it may be found the secret of much of the dash and gallantry of the Irish troops. Up to the end of 1916, 221 Victoria Crosses have been awarded for great deeds done in the war. As many as twenty-four have been won by Catholics, of whom eighteen are Irish, a share out of all proportion to their numbers, but not—may I say?—to their valour. In order to appreciate adequately the significance of these figures it is necessary to remember the nature of the deed for which the Victoria Cross is given. It must be exceptionally daring, involving the greatest risk to life. It must be of special military value, or must lead to the saving of comrades otherwise hopelessly doomed. Above all, it must be done not under orders but as a spontaneous act on the soldier's own motion. It is largely due to their religion and the emblems of

their religion, and their views of fate and destiny, that Irish Catholic soldiers are so pre-eminently distinguished in the record of the highest and most noble acts of valour and self-sacrifice in war. There is the significant saying of Sergeant Dwyer, V.C., an Irishman and a Catholic, at a recruiting meeting in Trafalgar Square. "I don't know what the young men are afraid of," said he. "If your name is not on a bullet or a bit of shrapnel it won't reach you, any more than a letter that isn't addressed to you." He, poor fellow, got a bullet addressed to him on the Somme. "'Twas the will of God," was the lesson taught him by his creed.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE IRISH SOLDIER'S HUMOUR AND SERIOUSNESS

#### STORIES FROM THE FRONT, FUNNY AND OTHERWISE

THE memorable words of an Irish member, speaking in the House of Commons during the South African War, on the gallantry of the Irish regiments, come to my mind. "This war has shown," said he, "that as brave a heart beats under the tunic of a Dublin Fusilier as under the kilt of a Gordon Highlander."

The saying may be curiously astray as to the anatomy of the Scotch, but the truth of it in regard to Irish courage has been emphasised by the victories and disasters alike of the great world war. On all the fields of conflict east and west the Irish soldiers have earned the highest repute for valour. "They are magnificent fighters," says Lieutenant Denis Oliver Barnett, an English officer of a battalion of the Leinster Regiment, in letters which he wrote home to his own people. A public school boy, with a high reputation for scholarship, he became a soldier at the outbreak of war instead of going to Oxford. Courageous and high-minded himself—as his death on the parapet of the trenches, directing and heartening his men in bombing the enemy, testifies—his gay and sympathetic letters show that he was a good judge of character. He also says of his men, "They are cheerier than the English Tommies, and will stand

anything." Cheeriness in this awful war is indeed a most precious possession. It enhances the fighting capacity of the men. Where it does not exist spontaneously the officers take measures to cultivate it. As far as possible they try to remove all depressing influences, and make things bright and cheerful. I have got many such glimpses of the Irish soldier at the Front, and their total effect is the impersonation or bodying forth of an individual who provides his own gaiety, and has some over to give to others—whimsical, wayward, with a childlike petulance and simplicity; and yet very fierce withal.

I met at a London military hospital an Irish Catholic chaplain and an Irish officer of the Army Medical Corps back from French Flanders. They told Irish stories, to the great enjoyment and comfort of the wounded soldiers in the ward. "Be careful to boil that water before drinking it," said the doctor to men of an Irish battalion whom he found drawing supplies from a canal near Ypres. "Why so, sir?" asked one of the men. "Because it's full of microbes and boiling will kill them," answered the doctor. "And where's the good, sir?" said the soldier. "I'd as soon swallow a menagerie as a graveyard any day." Another example of a quick-witted Hibernian reply was given by the chaplain. He came upon a man of the transport service of his battalion belabouring a donkey which was slowly dragging a heavy load. "Why do you beat the poor animal so much?" remonstrated the priest; and he recalled a legend popular in Ireland by saying, "Don't you know from the cross on the ass's back that it was on an ass Our Lord went into Jerusalem?" "But, Father," said the soldier, "if Our Lord had this lazy ould ass He wouldn't be there yet." One of the inmates of the ward kept the laughter going by giving an example of Irish traditional blundering humour from the trenches—a humour due

to an excited and over-active mind. "Don't let the Germans know we're short of powder and shot," cried an Irish sergeant to his men, awaiting the bringing up of ammunition; "keep on firing away like blazes."

Some of the flowers of speech that have blossomed from the Irish regiments at the Front are also worth culling. Speaking of the Catholic chaplain of his battalion, a soldier said, "He'd lead us to heaven; an' we'd follow him to hell." As a loaf of bread stuck on a bayonet was passed on to him in the trenches another exclaimed, "Here comes the staff of life on the point of death." The irregularity of the food supply in the trenches was thus described: "It's either a feast or a famine. Sometimes you drink out of the overflowing cup of fulness, and other times you ate off the empty plate." "What have you there?" asked a nurse of an Irish private of the Army Medical Corps, at a base hospital, as he was rummaging among the contents of a packing-case. Taking out a wooden leg, he answered: "A stump speech agin the war."

Good-humour at the Front is by no means an exclusively Irish possession. Happily the soldiers of all the nationalities within the United Kingdom are so light-hearted as to find even in the most dismal situation cause for raillery, pleasantry and laughter, and to derive from their mirth a more enduring patience of discomfort and trouble. The Irish form of humour, however, differs entirely from the English, Scottish or Welsh variety not only in quality but in the type of mind and character it expresses. In most things that the Irish soldier says or does there is something racially individual. Perhaps its chief peculiarity, apart from its quaintness, is that usually there is an absence of any conscious aim or end behind it. The English soldier, and the Cockney especially, is a wag and a jester. He is very prone to satire and

irony, deliberate and purposeful. Even his "grousing"—a word, by the way, unheard in the Irish regiments, unless it is somewhat incomprehensibly used by an English non-commissioned officer—is a form of caustic wit. Irish humour has neither subtlety nor seriousness. It is just the light and spontaneous whim, caprice or fancy of the moment. It is humour in the original sense of the word, that is the expression of character, habit and disposition.

The Munstermen have contributed to the vocabulary at the Front the expressive phrase, "Gone west," for death; the bourne whence no traveller returns. In Kerry and Cork the word "west" or "wesht," as it is locally pronounced, expresses not only the mysterious and unknown, but is used colloquially for "behind," "at the back," or "out of the way." So it is also at the Front. A lost article is gone west as well as a dead comrade. "When I tould the Colonel," said an Irish orderly, "that the bottle of brandy was gone wesht, he was that mad that I thought he would have me ate." As food and drink are sent west, perhaps the Colonel had his suspicions. The saying, "Put it wesht, Larry, an' come along on with you," may be heard in French estaminets as well as in Kerry public-houses.

At parade a subaltern noticed that one of his men had anything but a clean shave on the left side of his jaw. "'Twas too far wesht for me to get at, sir," was the excuse. "Well," said the dentist to a Munster Fusilier, "where's this bad tooth that's troubling you?" "'Tis here, sir," said the soldier, "in the wesht of me jaw." Another Irish soldier told his Quartermaster that he was in a very unpleasant predicament for want of a new pair of trousers. "The one I've on me is all broken wesht," said he. It is fairly obvious what part of the trousers the west of it was.

It would seem from the stories I have heard that odd escapes from death are an unfailing source of playfulness and laughter. A shell exploded in a trench held by an Irish battalion. One man was hurled quite twelve feet in the air, and, turning two somersaults in his descent, alighted on his back, and but little hurt, just outside the trench. He quickly picked himself up and rejoined his astonished comrades. "He came down with that force," said an invalided Irish soldier who told me of the incident, "that it was the greatest wonder in the world he didn't knock a groan out of the ground." No groan came from the man himself. "That was a toss and a half, and no mistake," he remarked cheerily when he got back to the trench; and in answer to an inquiry whether he was much hurt he said, "I only feel a bit moidhered in me head." More comical still in its unexpectedness was the reply of another Irishman who met with a different misadventure from the same cause. A German 17-in. shell exploded on the parapet of a trench, and this Irishman was buried in the ruins. However, he was dug out alive, and his rescuers jokingly asked him what all the trouble was about. "Just those blessed snipers again," he spluttered through his mouth full of mud, "and may the devil fly away with the one that fired that bullet."

It is readily acknowledged at the Front that the Irish soldiers have a rich gift of natural humour. But, what is more—as some of my stories may show—they are never so exceedingly comic as when they do not intend to be comic at all. Is it not better to be funny without knowing it than to suffer the rather common lot of attempting to be funny and fail? It arises from an odd and unexpected way of putting things. How infinitely better it is than to be of so humdrum a quality as to be incapable of being comical even unconsciously in saying or in deed! Yet in this

essentially Irish form of fun there is often a snare for the unwary. How can you tell that these laughable things are said and done by Irish soldiers without any perception of humour or absurdity? If you could look behind the face of that apparently simple-minded Irish soldier you might find that in reality he was "pulling your leg"—or "humbugging," as he would say himself—in a way that you would regard as most uncalled for and aggravating.

For instance, an Irish sentry in a camp in France was asked by a colonel of the Army Service Corps whether he had seen any of his officers about that morning. "Indeed, and I did, sir," was the reply. "'Twas only a while ago that two of the gentlemen came out of the office down there below, and passed by this way." "And how did you know they were Army Service officers?" "Aisy enough, sir. Didn't I see their swords stuck behind their ears?" And in which category must be placed the equally amusing retort of another Irish sentry to his officer—the naïvely simple, or the slyly jocular? The sentry looked so shy and inexperienced that the officer put to him the question, "What are you here for?" and got the stereotyped answer, "To look out for anything unusual." "What would you call unusual?" asked the officer. "I don't know exactly, sir, until I saw it," was the reply. The officer became sarcastically facetious. "What would you do if you saw five battleships steaming across the field?" he said. "Take the pledge, sir," was the sentry's answer.

These officers are, by all accounts, but two of many who have got unlooked-for but diverting answers from Irish soldiers. A sergeant who was sent out with a party to make observations fell into an ambuscade and returned with only a couple of men. "Tell me what happened," said the commanding officer, when the sergeant came to make his report; "were

you surprised?" "Surprised isn't the word for it, sir," exclaimed the sergeant. "It was flabbergasted entirely I was when, creeping round the end of a thick hedge, we came plump into the devil of a lot of Germans lying on their stomachs." Then, seeing the officer smiling, as if in doubt, as he thought, he hastened thus to emphasise his wonder and astonishment at this sudden encounter. "I declare to you, sir, it nearly jumped the heart up out of me throat with the start it gave me." Of a like kind for ingenuousness was the report made by another Irish non-com. who found himself all alone in a trench, with only a barrier of sandbags between him and the Germans. "I had nayther men, machine-gun or grenade," he wrote, expressing not only his temporal but his spiritual condition, for he added, "nothing, save the help of the Mother of God."

In Ireland domestic servants are noted for their forward manners and liberty of speech with the family, and the same trait is rather general in the relations between different social grades. An illustration of what it leads to in the Army was afforded at a camp concert attended by a large assembly of officers and men of a certain Division, into which, at a solemn moment, an unsophisticated Irish soldier made a wild incursion. Lord Kitchener had been there that day and had inspected the Division, and the General in command announced from the platform how greatly pleased the Secretary for War was with the soldierly fitness of the men. "I told Lord Kitchener," continued the General, speaking in grave and impressive tones, "that the Division would see the thing through to the bitter end." In the midst of a loud burst of cheering an Irish private rushed forward, and sweeping aside the attempt of a subaltern to stop him, jumped on to the platform, and seizing the aged General by the hand, exclaimed, "Glory to you, me

vinerable friend! The ould Division will stick to it to the last, and it's you that's the gran' man to lade us to victory and everlasting fame." The General, greatly embarrassed, could only say, "Yes, yes, to be sure, my good fellow; yes, yes"; and the staff turned aside to hide their grins at this comic encounter between incongruities.

The Colonel of an Irish battalion, after a harassing day in the trenches, got a pleasant surprise in the shape of a roast fowl served for dinner by his orderly. After he had eaten it and found it tender he recalled that complaints were rather rife among the inhabitants about the plundering of hen-roosts, and his conscience smote him. "I hope you got that fowl honestly," he said. "Don't you be troubling your head about that, sir," replied the orderly, in a fine burst of evasion and equivocation. "Faith, 'twas quite ready for the killing, so it was, and that's the main thing." Then, as if to improve the occasion by a homily, he added, in a tone of religious fervour, "Ah, sure, if we wor all as ready to die as that hin, sir, we needn't mind a bit when the bullet came." The Colonel was almost "fit to die" with quiet laughter.

It may well be that sometimes the English officers of Irish battalions are puzzled by the nature of their men—its impulsiveness, its glow, its wild imagery and over-brimming expression. It is easy to believe, too, that the changeful moods of the men, childlike and petulant, now jovial, now fierce, and occasionally unaccountable, may be a sore annoyance to officers who are very formal and precise in matters of discipline. I have heard from an Irish Colonel of an Irish battalion that the English commander of the Brigade of which the battalion was a unit came to him one day in a rage and asked him where his damned fools had been picked up. It appears the Brigadier-General, going the rounds alone, came suddenly upon one of

the sentries of the battalion at a remote post. The sentry happened to be a wild slip of an Irish boy, not long joined and quite fresh from Mayo, and, taken by surprise, he challenged the Brigadier-General by calling out, "In the name of God, who the divil are you?" The Colonel told me his reply to the Brigadier-General was this: "Certainly, the challenge and the salute were not quite proper. But you can imagine what kind of a reception that simple but fearless lad would give to a German; and, after all, is not that the main thing just now?" Yes, the capacity of fighting well should, in war time, cover a multitude of imperfections in a soldier.

In order to get the best out of the Irish soldiers it is necessary to have a knowledge of their national habits and peculiarities, and a sympathetic understanding of their qualities and limitations. I am glad to be able to say that the most glowing tributes to the sterling character of the Irish soldiers that I have heard have come from their English or Scottish officers. These are true leaders, because they possess imagination and sympathy by which they can look into the hearts of men that are diverse from them in blood and temperament and nature.

I suppose there is nothing on earth, no matter how solemn or terrible, which may not be turned into a subject of irreverent humour in one or other of its aspects. English soldiers appear to have found that out even in regard to the war. An officer told me of a remarkable encounter on a Flanders high road between an Irish battalion coming back from the trenches and an English battalion going up for a turn at holding a section of the lines, which he thought presented a striking contrast in racial moods. The uniforms of the Irishmen were plastered with mud, and they had a week's grime on their unshaven faces. They had also suffered heavily in repelling a German

attack. Yet they looked as proud as if they had saved Ireland by their exertions, and hoped to save the Empire by their example, and they sang from the bottom of their hearts, and at the top of their voices, the anthem of their national yearnings and aspirations, with its refrain—

“ Whether on the scaffold high, or the battlefield we die,  
What matter when for Erin dear we fall.”

The English battalion, spick and span, swung by to horrible discomforts, to wounds and death, as blithely as if they were on a route march at home. They also were singing, and if they were in the same mood as the Irishmen they would be rendering the chorus—

“ Land of Hope and Glory,  
Mother of the Free,  
How shall we extol thee  
Who are born of thee?  
Wider still and wider  
Shall thy bounds be set;  
God, who made thee mighty,  
Make thee mightier yet.”

But instead of that the chorus of their song, set to a hymn tune, was this—

“ Will you fight for England?  
Will you face the foe?  
And every gallant soldier  
Boldly answered—NO !”

It has been said, with general acceptance, that the spirit of a nation can best be studied in its songs. But can it really? How wrong would be the moral drawn from its application in this case! High patriotism is a solemn thing; but the average British soldier's attitude towards it is like that of Dr. Johnson when he took up philosophy—“somehow cheerfulness was always breaking in.” The English soldier will

not sing songs of a lofty type and deep purpose—songs which express either intimate personal feeling or deeply felt national convictions. These emotions he hides or suppresses, for he cannot give vent to them without feeling shamefaced or fearing that he may be regarded as insincere. Yet he is by no means so inconsequential or cynical as he affects to be. He is animated—none more so—by the spirit of duty and sacrifice. When it comes to fighting he is in earnest, desperately and ferociously in earnest, as the Germans know to their cost. It seems to me that he has been misled by Kipling into supposing that the true pose of the British soldier is to be more concerned with the temporal than with the spiritual, to grumble about the petty inconveniences of his calling, to pretend to an indifference to its romantic side and its ideals, to die without thinking that the spirits of his national heroes are looking down upon him.

The Irish have the reputation of having a delight in fighting. It is supposed that "ructions" are the commonplace of their civic life. Undoubtedly they have "a strong weakness"—as they would phrase it themselves—for distributing bloody noses and cracked crowns even among friends. It is true, also, that they find the grandest scope for their natural disposition in warfare. A war correspondent relates that he met a wounded Dublin Fusilier hobbling painfully back to the field dressing-station after a battle, and giving the man his arm to help him on, he was prompted to make the pitying remark: "It's a dreadful war." "'Tis indeed, sir; a dreadful war enough," said the soldier; and then came the characteristic comment: "but, sure, 'tis far better than no war at all."

Still, individuals are to be found among the Irish soldiers who take quite a materialistic view of the Army, and fail to rise to the anticipation of glory in a pending action. An agricultural labourer who had

become one of Kitchener's men was asked how he liked soldiering. "It's the finest life in the whole wide world," he exclaimed. "It's mate, drink, lodgin' and washin' all in one. Wasn't I working hard for ten long years for a farmer there beyant in Kerry, and never once in all that time did the ould boy say to me, 'Stand at aise.'" It will be noticed that in this enthusiastic outburst there is nothing about the divarshion of fighting. Another story that I heard records the grim foreboding of an Irish soldier who was lagging behind on the march to the trenches for the first time. "Keep up, keep up," cried the officer; and, by way of encouragement, he added: "You know, we'll soon make a Field Marshal of you." "You're welcome to your joke, sir," said the soldier; "but I know well what you'll make of me—a casualty, sure enough." Another Irish soldier thought he saw a way of making money out of the fighting. The Colonel of the battalion told his men, according to the story, that for every German they would kill he would give a sovereign. The next morning the men were told the Germans were coming. "How many?" "Thirty thousand at least." "Wake up, Mike," said one to a sleeping comrade; "our fortune is made."

There is also a story told of a remark made by an Irish soldier regardless of the glory and romance of the highest distinction in the Army. The award of the Victoria Cross to Michael O'Leary was held up to a battalion for emulation. "Yerra," cried a voice, "I'd a great deal rather get the Victoria 'bus." It may be that in this we have nothing more than an instance of the impish tendency in the Irish nature displaying itself at the spur of the moment, rather than the yearning for home, its ease, repose and comforts. It recalls an anecdote of the American Civil War. General Thomas Francis Meagher of the Irish Brigade was informed by an aide-de-camp in the

course of a battle that the Federalists had carried an important strategic point and several colours belonging to Confederate battalions. "Here's good news for ye, boys," shouted Meagher. "Our troops have won the day and captured the enemy's colours." "Yerra, Gineral," cried a private, looking up at Meagher, who was on horseback, "I'd rather have, this blessed minute, half a pint of Dinnis McGure's whisky than all the colours of the rainbow." Then there is the story told by the Colonel of an Irish regiment of an incident in the Battle of the Somme. He noticed that a private followed everywhere at his heels, and especially where the fighting was hottest. The Colonel thought that perhaps the private was anxious to come to his aid should any harm befall him. At the end of the day, however, the private thus explained his conduct to the Colonel : "My mother says to me, sir, 'Stick to the Colonel, and you'll be all right. Them Colonels never get hurt.' "

But, with all their playfulness and jocularity, there are no soldiers to whom the serious aspects of the war make a more direct appeal than to the Irish. This is seen in various ways. It is seen in their devotional exercises. The Irish Guards and other Irish regiments have been known frequently to recite the Rosary and sing hymns even in the trenches. It is seen also in their national fervour. They go into action singing their patriotic songs. From these qualities they derive support for their martial spirit, their endurance and their unconquerable courage. They never quail in the face of danger. No soldiers have risen to loftier heights of moral heroism, as the numerous records of their deeds on the roll of the Victoria Cross bear inspiring witness.

But their humour always remains. One of the injunctions to men at the Front is "Don't put your head above the parapet." The Irish soldiers are more apt

than others to disregard it, however frequently its wisdom is brought home to them. I have heard only one that was convinced. "Faix," he remarked, as the bullets of the snipers soon stopped his survey of the prospect outside the trench, "it's aisy to understand that the more a man looks round in this war the less he's likely to see." They have a comforting philosophy that it takes many a ton of lead to kill a man. An Irish soldier invalided home from France was asked what struck him most about the battles he took part in. "What struck me most?" said he. "Sure it was the crowd of bullets flying about that didn't hit me!"

## CHAPTER IX

### THE IRISH BRIGADE

“EVERYWHERE AND ALWAYS FAITHFUL”

PRIDE and sorrow struggle for mastery at the spectacle of troops returning to camp from the battle, their appearance telling of the intolerable strain which this war imposes, even in the case of victory, upon the human faculties. The thought of it alone is painful to the feelings of any one who has the least imagination. They are all begrimed and careworn, and many have the distraught look of those who have seen and suffered terrible things. So the Irish Brigade came back from Guillamont and Guinchy, on the Somme, in the early days of September 1916, what time the Empire was resounding with the fame of their exploits. On a Sunday they carried Guillamont with a rush; on the following Saturday they literally pounced upon Guinchy, and in between they lay in open trenches under continuous shell fire.

I saw the Irish Brigade before they left for the Front, and noted in the ranks the many finely shaped heads and thoughtful faces of poets and leaders of men, interspersed with the lithe frames of athletes and the resolute, hard-bitten countenances of born fighters. At first I was moved to sorrow at the thought of the pass to which civilisation has come that the best use which could be made of all this superb youth and manhood in its valiancy was to send it forth into the devouring jaws of war. Then I perceived that some-

thing like a radiance shimmered about the marching ranks. It came, I noticed, both from their muscular strength and their martial ardour, for the flush of battle already mantled their cheeks, and its light was in their dancing eyes; and at once I understood that if I saw but the mound surmounted by the little wooden cross in France, and in Ireland the desolate hearthstone, they, with the wider and more aspiring imagination of youth, rejoiced that they were going out to fight in liberty's defence, and saw only their bayonets triumphantly agleam in the fury of the engagement. Careless and gay, they captured the two villages on the Somme in a ding-dong, helter-skelter fashion. They maintained the reputation of the Irish infantry as "the finest missile troops in the British Army" (so they are described by Colonel Repington, the renowned military correspondent of *The Times*), by the spirit and dash of their charge, their eagerness to get quickly into touch with the foe, and the energy and dexterity with which they wield that weapon which finally decides the issue of battles—the bayonet.

As they emerged out of the cloud of smoke on the Somme, and marched back to camp in much diminished numbers—caked with mud, powdered with grey dust, very tired—across the ground their valour had won and their grit maintained against fierce counter attacks, they displayed quite another phase of the Irish nature—its melancholy and its mysticism. The piper that led them back began to play some old Irish rhapsodies having that wonderful blending of joy and grief which makes these airs so haunting. That was well. For the men were in so extreme a stage of exhaustion, physical and mental, that they lurched and reeled, and were overwhelmed with distress at missing many beloved comrades that fought with them, and officers that led them only a few days

before. Then they heard the pipes, and their hearts were uplifted by the strains, plaintive and yearning, defiant and challenging, which expresses in music the history of their race. They seemed, indeed, to have caught even some of the jaunty, boastful swagger of the piper, as he strode before them, blowing into his reeds and working the bag with his left elbow.

The General of the Brigade watched his troops go by, and in his eyes they were all the grander for the horrid disarray of their torn, muddy and bloody uniforms, and their haggard faces blackened with sweat and smoke and soil. "I am proud of you," he called out in a voice surging with emotion. "Ye did damned well, boys." A handful of men, once a company, was led by a sergeant. Every officer was gone. "Bravo, Dublins!" exclaimed the General; but for the moment his heart was heavy within him as he recalled to mind the dashing, gallant young lads, so hearty and joyous, buried now round about the ruins of the villages from which the Germans had been driven at the bayonet-point by the splendid rank and file at whose head they fell. Quickly the thoughts of the General came back to the survivors. "Ireland is proud of you, boys," he cried in exultant tones. He knew that would stir them. Ireland is their glory; and they lifted up their heads a little more as they caught the import of their Commander's words.

This Irish Brigade, officially known as the Irish Division, was the outcome of the meeting in Dublin addressed by Mr. Asquith, shortly after the outbreak of the war, in the course of his tour of the country as Prime Minister to explain the origins and aims of the conflict. Lord Wimborne, the Viceroy, presided. The Lord Mayor of Dublin and mayors of most of the chief towns of Ireland, the chairmen of county councils and representatives of all shades of political and religious opinions were present. Mr. John

Redmond proposed, at the meeting, the formation of an Irish Brigade. While "Irish Division" sounds meaningless to young Irishmen, "Irish Brigade" at once arouses thrilling memories of the battlefields of Europe during the eighteenth century. For a hundred years, from the fall of the Stuarts to the French Revolution, there was an Irish Brigade in the service of France. It was regularly recruited from Ireland through that long span of time, though to join it was a penal offence. As the young men stole secretly away to France in smuggling crafts from the west of Ireland, they were popularly known as "the wild geese." "Everywhere and always Faithful" was the motto bestowed on the Brigade by the King of France. That being so, there was a hearty response to the call for a new Irish Brigade to serve again in France, and for causes more worthy than the old.

Just as the Ulster Division was composed of Unionists and Protestants, the Irish Division was recruited mainly from the Nationalist and Catholic sections of the population. The Nationalist Volunteers, supporters of the policy and aims of the Irish Parliamentary Party, provided most of the rank and file. Like another Irish Division, the first of Ireland's distinctive contributions to the New Armies, which perished in the ill-starred expedition to Gallipoli, the Irish Division was composed of the youth of Ireland at its highest and best—clean of soul and strong of body, possessing in the fullest measure all the brightest qualities of the race, the intellectual and spiritual, not less than the political and humorous.

One of the first to join was Mr. William Redmond, M.P. for East Clare, younger brother of the Irish Leader, though he was well over the military age. He was appointed Captain in the Royal Irish Regiment—the premier Irish regiment—in which he had served thirty-three years previously, before his elec-

tion to the House of Commons. Speaking at an early recruiting meeting, he said that, should circumstances so demand, he would say to his countrymen "Come" instead of "Go." He was as good as his word. For his services at the Front he was promoted to the rank of Major, and has been mentioned by Field-Marshal Haig in despatches. Other nationalist Members of Parliament who were officers of the Brigade were Captain W. Archer Redmond, Dublin Fusiliers, son of Mr. John Redmond, Captain Stephen Gwynn, well known as a man of letters, who joined the Connaught Rangers as a private and was promoted to the rank of Captain in the battalion; Captain J. L. Esmonde, Dublin Fusiliers, and Captain D. D. Sheehan, Munster Fusiliers, who also gave his two boys to the Brigade. General Sir Lawrence Parsons, son of the Earl of Rosse—scion of a distinguished Irish family resident for centuries at Birr, King's Co.—was appointed to the command of the Division.

Sir Francis Vane, an eminent Irish soldier of Nationalist sympathies, who was appointed by the War Office to supervise the recruiting for the Division, says that never in his life did he witness so extraordinary a scene as that presented at Buttevant and Fermoy, co. Cork, where the men first assembled in September and October 1914. "It reminded me," he says, "of the pages of Charles Lever in the variety of Irish types answering to the call. There were old men and young sportsmen, students, car drivers, farm labourers, Members of Parliament, poets, *litterateurs*, all crowding into barracks which were totally incapable of housing decently the half of them." They were dressed in all sorts of clothes, from the khaki, red and blue of the Services, to "the latest emanation of the old clo' merchants." That curious assortment of all types and classes was the rough material out of which was fashioned, by training and discipline, a

superb military instrument. The soldierly essentials were there in abundance. Within two years they came successfully through ordeals that would have tried the nerves of the toughest veterans of the Old Guard of Napoleon.

In the course of 1915 the Division was removed to camps at Aldershot to complete their training. The men were visited there, in November, by Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, who gave them his benediction, and said he was sure they would do their duty at the Front "as good children of Ireland and good sons of the Catholic Church." Early in December they were reviewed by the Queen. It was originally arranged that the review should be held by the King, but his Majesty, on a visit to the Front, had been flung from his horse, and was not sufficiently recovered from the accident to be able to be present. Among those in the reserved enclosure surrounding the saluting-base that day were Mr. John Dillon, M.P., and Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P. In the march past the Queen they were led off by the South Irish Horse, a body of Yeomanry. Each of the three infantry brigades was headed by one of the Irish wolfhounds which Mr. John Redmond presented to the Division as mascots. At the conclusion of the review her Majesty sent for General Parsons and the three Brigadier-Generals, and congratulated them upon the appearance and efficiency of the troops.

Shortly afterwards the Division left for the Front, under the command of Major-General William Bernard Hickie, C.B., an Irishman and a Catholic, who has had a very brilliant military career. Born on May 21, 1865, the eldest son of the late Colonel J. F. Hickie of Slevoyre, Borrisokane, co. Tipperary, he was educated at Oscott and Sandhurst. At the age of nineteen he joined his father's old regiment, the 1st battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, of which in due

course he became Colonel. In the South African War he served on the Staff, in command of a mounted infantry corps and of a mobile column. On his return home he became Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General to the 8th Division. In 1912 he was appointed Assistant Quartermaster-General of the Irish Command. On the outbreak of the war General Hickie became Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General of the Second Army, and is stated to have particularly distinguished himself maintaining good order during the retreat from Mons. The Irish Brigade was most fortunate in having such a man as Commander. Thoroughly understanding the Irish character, its weak points as well as its strong ones—its good-humoured and careless disposition; its impatience often of the restraints and servitude of military life; its eagerness always for a fight or any sort of enterprise with a spice of danger in it—he was able to get the most out of his men. One of his happy thoughts was the institution of a system of rewards in the Division apart from but supplementary to the usual military honours. Any company officer or man who, in the opinion of the commander of his regiment, has given proof of exceptional good conduct and devotion to duty in the field, is presented by General Hickie with a Parchment Certificate at a parade. The certificate has been specially prepared in Ireland, having the words "The Irish Brigade" in Gaelic letters enwreathed with shamrocks at the top, setting out the name of the recipient, the nature and date of his achievement, and the signature of the General. The men send these certificates home, where they are preserved as precious mementoes. An Honours Book of the Irish Brigade is also kept in which these presentations and the military honours won are recorded.

The first experience which the Irish Brigade had of the trenches was in the Loos-Hullock line. It

is the most desolate of the war-stricken regions, one bare, black, open plain, where everything has been blown to pieces and levelled to the ground, save here and there some wire entanglements; where there is no sign of human life, except when parties of the thousands upon thousands of combatants who burrow beneath its surface, emerge in the darkness of the night for stealthy raids on each other's positions. The front line trenches of both sides run close together. At one point they are no more than sixteen yards apart. They are notoriously of the worst type, nothing more, indeed, than shallow and slimy drains, badly provided with dug-outs, and much exposed to fire. Under such conditions the craving of the body for food and rest could be satisfied only at the bare point of existence.

Major William Redmond, in a letter to Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, dated February 3, 1916, says: "Our first spell in the trenches was for twelve days, and in that time we had no change of clothing, just stayed as we were all the time. The shelling was terrific, and the Division suffered some losses. The day before we came out the enemy began to celebrate the Kaiser's birthday, January 27, and we were shelled without ceasing for twenty-four hours. The men of our Division behaved very well, and received good reports; so the General said." Testimony to the excellent way in which the Irishmen passed through the ordeal comes from quite independent and impartial sources. Here, for example, is an extract from a letter written by the Rev. H. J. Collins, chaplain to a battalion of the Black Watch—

" Our Division had the privilege of introducing the Irish battalions to the trenches, when they arrived out here; and they were our guests for a week or so before taking over on their own account. They made a great impression on our lads by their cheerfulness and their eagerness to be ' up and

at' the Hun. The Connaughts arrived one evening just as our line was being heavily shelled, and although they were our visitors they at once took charge of the situation. They had never been in the trenches in their lives before; they were experiencing shell fire for the first time; and before they had had time to get their packs off and settle down, one impatient sergeant was over the parapet, crying out in a rich and musical brogue : ' Come on, the Connaughts ! ' "

As is well known, the men of one regiment are not greatly disposed to praise those of another. In fact, some bitter regimental feuds exist in the British Army, or used to among the old Regulars. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable to find in the *Glasgow Herald* of February 24, 1916, a letter signed "Jock," proclaiming in the warmest terms the fine qualities of the new Irish soldiers. "Your readers may like to hear that we Scotsmen, who have been tried and not found wanting, have a great admiration for the new Irish Division that came out some time ago," says "Jock." "We have lived in the trenches side by side with them, and find them as keen as a hollow-ground and as ardent as a young lover. At a recent attack when the Germans were advancing the excitement became unbearable, and one sergeant got up on the parapet with the shout of : ' Come on, bhoys, get at them.' One of them, too, was heard to grumble, ' Here we've been in th' trinches fur two weeks an' niver wance over th' paradise.' It is to be feared they will outvie even the kilts."

Yet during this instructional period, when the various battalions of the Brigade were attached to other regiments for preliminary practice in the trenches, some high military honours were won. Sergeant J. Tierney, of the Leinster Regiment; Lance-Corporal A. Donagh, and Private P. F. Duffy, of the Connaught Rangers, gained the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Donagh and Duffy, in response to a call for volunteers, undertook to carry messages for-

ward under heavy fire, as all telephone communication had been cut. The task was one of extreme danger, but the men succeeded in accomplishing it unhurt, and were awarded the D.C.M. for their coolness and bravery. Corporal Timoney, of the Munster Fusiliers, was especially mentioned in Army Orders for an act of courage in picking up and throwing away a live Mills-grenade which had fallen among some men under instruction. By this act he undoubtedly saved the lives of several men, and if it had happened in the field instead of at practice he would have been eligible for recommendation for a higher honour.

## CHAPTER X

### IRISH REPLIES TO GERMAN WILES AND POISON GAS

#### HOW THE MUNSTERS CAPTURED THE ENEMY'S WHEEDLING PLACARDS

It was from the Germans that the Irish Brigade got the first intimation of the troubles in Dublin at Easter, 1916. The Germans, heedless of their failure to induce the Irish soldiers in their captivity to forswear allegiance and honour, availed themselves of the Rebellion to try their wiles on the Irish soldiers in the field. Both sides in the trenches often become acquainted, in curious ways, with the names and nationality of the regiments opposed to them. But in regard to a particular section of the British line, between Hulluch and Loos, in April 1916, the Germans might easily know it was held by Irish troops. The fact was proclaimed by the green banner with the golden harp which the boys of the Brigade hoisted over the breastworks—the flag which, in their eyes, has been consecrated in the great cause of liberty by the deeds and sacrifices of their forefathers, the flag for whose glorified legend they were proud to die. So it happened that one morning these Irish troops were surprised to see two placards nailed to boards on the top of poles, displayed by the Germans, on which the following was written in English—

" Irishmen ! In Ireland's revolution English guns are firing on your wives and children. The English Military Bill

has been refused. Sir Roger Casement is being persecuted. Throw away your arms; we give you a hearty welcome.

"We are Saxons. If you don't fire, we won't."

The Irish Brigade and the Irish Volunteers who rose in rebellion in Dublin were alike recruited from the same class. Such are the unhappily wayward circumstances of Irish life that the tremendous fact whether this lad or that was to fight for England in Flanders or against her in Dublin was in many cases decided by mere chance or accident. At any rate, the kith and kin of numbers of men of the Irish Brigade were among the Sinn Feiners. A widowed mother in Dublin had, in consequence, a most tragic experience. The post on Easter Monday morning brought her a letter from a company officer of a battalion in the Irish Brigade announcing that her son had been killed in action. "He died for Ireland," said the officer, knowing that it was true and that it would help to soften her maternal grief. Before the day was out her other son, wearing the green uniform of the Irish Volunteers, staggered home mortally wounded, and as he lay gasping out his life on the floor he, too, used the same phrase of uplifting memories: "Mother, don't fret. Sure, I'm dying for Ireland."

The effect of the German placards on the battalion of Munster Fusiliers, then holding the British line, was very far astray from that which their authors hoped for and intended. A fusillade of bullets at once bespattered the wheedling phrases. What fun to make a midnight foray on the German trenches and carry off the placards as trophies! No sooner was the adventure suggested than it was agreed to. In the darkness of night a body of twenty-five men and two officers of the Munsters crawled out into No Man's Land. They were discovered when about half-way across by a German searchlight, and then the flying

bullets of two machine-guns commenced to splutter about them. Some of the men were killed; some were wounded. The others lay still for hours in the rank grass before they resumed their stealthy crawl, like the Indians they used to read of in boyhood stories, and, having noiselessly cut their way under the enemy entanglements, they sprang, with fixed bayonets and terrifying yells, into the trench. The Germans, startled out of their senses by this most unexpected visit, scurried like rabbits into the nearest dug-outs. The notice-boards were then seized and borne in triumph to the Irish trenches, to the unbounded delight and pride of the battalion; and they are now treasured among the regiment's most precious spoils of vanquished enemies.

A few days later, on the morning of April 27, the Germans tried what blows could do where lying blandishments had failed; and the Irish Brigade had to face, for the first time, an infantry attack in force. The enemy began their operations by concentrating a bombardment of great intensity upon trenches held by Dublin Fusiliers. Then, shortly after five o'clock, there came on the light breeze that blew from the German lines a thick and sluggish volume of greenish smoke. "Poison gas! On with your helmets!" Surely, the hearts of the most indomitable might well have quailed at the thought of the writhing agony endured by those who fall victims to this new and most terrible agency of war. Instead of that, the flurry and excitement of putting on the masks was followed by roars of laughter as the men looked at one another and saw the fantastic and absurd beings, with grotesque goggle-eyes, into which they had transformed themselves. But they were not the only monsters in the uncanny scene. Like grey spectres, sinister and venomous, the Germans appeared as they came on, partly screened by the foul vapour which

rolled before them. Not one of them reached the Irish trenches. The Dublins, standing scathless in the poison clouds which enveloped them, poured out round after round of rifle fire, until the Germans broke and fled, leaving piles of their dead and wounded at the wire entanglements, and the body of the officer who had led them caught in the broken strands.

Two hours later, that same morning, there was another sally from the German trenches, under cover of gas, against a different section of the Irish. The parapets here had been so demolished by shell fire that the Germans gained a footing in the trenches. But they were hardly in before they were out again. "The time during which the Germans were in occupation of our trenches was a matter of minutes only," says the war correspondent of *The Times*. They were put to rout by the Inniskillings, who came up from the reserve trenches at the double. "Never was a job more cleanly and quickly done," adds *The Times* correspondent. On the next occasion that the Germans launched an attack with gas, they had themselves to drink, so to speak, the poison cup they had prepared for the Irish. That was two days subsequently, on April 29. "Providence was on our side," writes Major William Redmond, "for the wind suddenly changing, the gas blew back over the German trenches where the Bavarians had already massed for attack. Taken by surprise, they left their front line and ran back across the open under the heavy and well-directed fire of our artillery. In one battalion of that Bavarian Infantry Regiment the losses from their own gas and from our fire on that day were stated to be, by a deserter, over eight hundred; and the diary of a prisoner of another battalion captured on the Somme in September states that his regiment also had about five hundred gassed cases, a large number of whom died."

The Irish Division continued to hold the Hulluch-

Loos sector of the line until the end of August 1916. They were subjected to severe bombardments. It was a common occurrence for the enemy to send from two to five thousand 5·9 shells a day into their trenches. What fortitude and grim determination must they not have had at their command to enable them to pass unshaken through these terrible ordeals. They retaliated in the way they love best, with many a dashing raid on the German positions.

For conspicuous gallantry in these operations the Military Cross was awarded to several of the officers. In the cases of Captain Victor Louis Manning and Lieutenant Nicholas Joseph Egan of the Dublin Fusiliers, the official record says that "by skilful and determined handling of their bombing parties they drove off three determined bomb attacks by the enemy in greatly superior numbers," and that "they continued to command their parties after they had both been wounded," gives but a faint idea of the daring nature of their deed. A small counter-mine was exploded under a German mine at a point between the opposing lines, but nearer to those of the Germans. The Germans were able to occupy the mound first and establish a machine-gun on it, with which they dominated the Dublin trenches. Volunteers being called for to clear them out, Lieutenant Egan and a small party of privates, armed with bombs, rushed out and carried the position. Then they had to hold it against German counter-attacks which were launched during the next three days. Lieutenant Egan was wounded in the wrist early in the fight, but he and six men, being plentifully supplied with bombs, held their ground doggedly. Instead of waiting for the Germans to reach the mound, in what threatened to be the worst of the counter-attacks, the party of Dublins advanced to meet them and drove them back, thus conveying the impression that they were in

greater strength than was really the case. On the night of the third day another party, under Captain Manning, came to their support. After a further series of encounters had ended in favour of the Dublins, the Germans abandoned the hope of recapturing the post, which was subsequently strongly consolidated by the victors. On the fourth day, when the struggle had definitely ended in favour of the Dublins, and Lieutenant Egan was about to return to the lines, a bomb fell at his feet. He was blown a distance of fifteen yards, and was picked up seriously wounded in the thigh. Lieutenant Egan is a grandson of Mr. Patrick Egan of New York, well known in the stormy agrarian agitation in Ireland under Parnell and Davitt as the treasurer of the Land League. Previous to the war Lieutenant Egan was in business in Canada.

Another fine exploit standing to the credit of the Irish Brigade was that of Lieutenant Patrick Stephen Lynch of the Leinsters, who got the Military Cross "for conspicuous gallantry when successfully laying and firing a torpedo under the enemy's wire." It was an uncommon deed, and just as uncommon is the very remarkable tribute with which the official record ends : "His cool bravery is very marked and his influence over his men very great." The Brigadier-General, George Pereira, D.S.O., in a letter of congratulation to Lieutenant Lynch, dated July 1, 1916, says : "Your leading the attack along the parapet was splendid, but you must be more careful another time." Before the month was out Lieutenant Lynch got a bar to his Military Cross—in other words, he had won the distinction twice over—an honour which, as General Hickie wrote to him, was well deserved, and likely to be very rare. This young Waterford man—a fine type of the fearless and dashing Irish officer, made out of a civilian in two years—was promoted

Captain in the Leinsters, and was killed on his birthday and the completion of his twenty-fifth year, December 27, 1916. The battalion was plunged into grief by the loss of Captain Lynch. “‘Paddy’—the name we all knew him by from the C.O. down to the youngest sub.—was considered the most efficient officer in this battalion, and he was certainly the most popular,” writes Lieutenant H. W. Norman, an officer of the Captain’s company. “Everybody mourns his death, and when the news got to his men they could not believe that such a brave and daring officer could be killed, but the news was only too true; and when it was confirmed I saw many’s the officer and man crying like children. He lost his life to save his men, who were in a trench that was being heavily shelled. He went up with a sergeant, in spite of danger and certain death, to get them out, and on the way up a shell landed in the trench where they were, killing both instantaneously.” Another noble deed was that for which Lieutenant John Francis Gleeson, Munster Fusiliers, won the Military Cross. “Under heavy rifle fire and machine-gun fire, he left his trench to bring in a wounded man lying within ten yards of the enemy entanglements.”

It was also in connection with these raids on the German trenches that the Irish Division gained the first of its Victoria Crosses. The hero is Captain Arthur Hugh Batten-Pooll of the Munster Fusiliers—a Somerset man, and he got the V.C. “for most conspicuous bravery whilst in command of a raiding party.” At the moment of entry into the enemy’s lines,” the official record continues, “he was severely wounded by a bomb, which broke and mutilated all the fingers of his right hand. In spite of this he continued to direct operations with unflinching courage, his voice being clearly heard cheering on and directing his men. He was urged, but refused, to

retire. Half an hour later, during the withdrawal, whilst personally assisting in the rescue of other wounded men, he received two further wounds. Still refusing assistance, he walked unaided to within a hundred yards of our lines, when he fainted, and was carried in by the covering party." Captain D. D. Sheehan of the Munster Fusiliers supplies the following spirited account of the raid—

"Our men got into the enemy's trenches with irresistible dash. They met with a stout resistance. There was no stopping or stemming the sweep of the men of Munster. They rushed the Germans off their feet. They bombed and they bludgeoned them. Indeed, the most deadly instrument of destruction in this encounter was the short heavy stick, in the shape of a shillelagh, the use of which, we are led to believe, is the prescriptive and hereditary right of all Irishmen. The Munster Fusiliers gave the Huns such a dressing and drubbing on that night as they are not likely to have since forgotten. Half an hour in the trenches and all was over. Dug-outs and all were done for. Of the eight officers, four were casualties, two, unhappily, killed, and two severely wounded, of whom one was Batten-Pooll."

For months the Irish Brigade had on their right the renowned Ulster Division. Thus the descendants of the two races in Ireland who for more than two centuries were opposed politically and religiously, and often came to blows under their rival colours of "Orange" and "Green," were now happily fighting side by side in France for the common rights of man. Though born and bred in the same tight little island, the men themselves had been severed by antagonisms arising out of those hereditary feuds, and thus but imperfectly understood each other. "When they met from time to time," says Major William Redmond, M.P., "the best of good feeling and comradeship was shown as between brother Irishmen." Evidence of these amicable relations is afforded by a letter written by Private J. Cooney of the Royal Irish Regiment.

"The Ulster Division are supporting us on our right," he says. "The other morning I was out by myself and met one of them. He asked me what part of Ireland I belonged to. I said a place called Athlone, in the county Westmeath. He said he was a Belfast man and a member of the Ulster Volunteers. I said I was a National Volunteer, and that the National Volunteers were started in my native town. 'Well,' said he, 'that is all over now. We are Irishmen fighting together, and we will forget all these things.' 'I don't mind if we do,' said I; 'but I'm not particularly interested. We must all do our bit out here, no matter where we come from, north or south, and that is enough for the time.'" Private Cooney adds: "This young Belfast man was very anxious to impress me with the fact that we Irish were all one; that there should be no bad blood between us, and we became quite friendly in the course of a few minutes." Meeting thus in the valley of darkness, blood and tears, the fraternity born of the dangers they were incurring for the same great ends, united them far more closely than years of ordinary friendship could have done. To many on both sides the cause of their traditional hostility appeared very trivial; and there were revealed to them reasons, hitherto obscured by prejudice and convention, for mutual loving-kindness and even for national unification.

But it was not the first time that north and south fought together in the Empire's battle. There is an eloquent passage on the subject in Conan Doyle's *Great Boer War*. It refers to the advance of Hart's "Irish Brigade"—consisting of the 1st Inniskillings, 1st Connaughts and 1st Dublins—over an open plain to the Tugela river, at the Battle of Colenso, under heavy fire from front and flank, and even from the rear, for a regiment in support fired at them, not knowing that any of the line was so far advanced—

" Rolling on in a broad wave of shouting, angry men, they never winced from the fire until they swept up to the bank of the river. Northern Inniskillings and Southern men of Connaught, orange and green, Protestant and Catholic, Celt and Saxon, their only rivalry now was who could shed his blood most freely for the common cause. How hateful those provincial politics and narrow sectarian creeds which can hold such men apart ! "

On July 1 the Ulster Division won immortal renown on the Somme. It was now the turn of the Irish Brigade to uphold the martial fame of the race on the same stricken field. They were done with trench raids for a while, and in for very big fighting.

## CHAPTER XI

### STORMING OF GUILLAMONT BY THE IRISH BRIGADE

#### RAISING THE GREEN FLAG IN THE CENTRE OF THE VILLAGE

AT the end of August the Irish Brigade was ordered to the Somme. The civil authorities of the district, headed by the mayor and curé, called upon General Hickie to express their appreciation of the good conduct and religious devotion of his troops. The General was a proud man that day. Nothing pleased him more than praise of his soldiers. In return, they gloried in him. As an example of his fatherly solicitude for them, he had established a divisional laundry under the care of the nuns, in which 25,000 shirts a week and 5000 pairs of socks per day are washed for them, and every day's rations sent to the men in the trenches was accompanied by a dry pair of socks. The result was that "trench feet"—feet benumbed with the cold and the wet—were almost unknown in the Division. He also provided for a thousand baths a day being given to his men in a specially constructed bath-house.

The marches of the Brigade to their new station was done to the accompaniment of patter, drip, trickle, ripple, splash—all the creepy sounds of continuous rain, and across the sodden and foul desolation that was once the fair fields of France. Up to the firing

line swung a battalion of the Munster Fusiliers, gaily whistling and singing in the rain. They carried a beautiful banner of the Sacred Heart, the gift of the people of the city of Limerick, from which many of the men came. Miss Lily Doyle of Limerick, who made the presentation to Major Lawrence Roche of the battalion, tells me that the idea of the banner originated with the Reverend Mother of the Good Shepherd's Convent, Limerick, who had read, in what are termed the "Extended Revelations," that a promise was given by Jesus to Blessed Margaret Mary that, inasmuch as soldiers derided His Sacred Heart when He hung upon the Cross, any soldiers who made reparation by carrying His standard would have victory with them. The cost of the banner (£10) was mainly raised by penny subscriptions. It was worked by the Good Shepherd nuns on crimson poplin. On one side is a beautiful piece of embroidery representing Our Lord with His Heart exposed on His breast to Blessed Margaret Mary, with the inscriptions, "Tu Rex Gloria Christi" and "Parce Domine, parce populo tuo." On the other side are the words of the Archangel Michael : "Quis ut Deus," surrounded with monograms of "Royal Munster Fusiliers" and "God save Ireland." "You could not have sent us a more suitable gift," the Rev. J. Wrafter, S.J., chaplain of the battalion, wrote to Miss Doyle, "or one which would give more pleasure to the men. I believe they prefer it to any material comforts that are sent to them." This is the third religious banner borne by soldiers since the Crusades. The first was the standard of Joan of Arc, and the second that of the Pontifical Zouaves, when Rome was an independent state. As the Munsters thus marched to battle a cry of "Look!" was suddenly raised in the ranks, and as all eyes turned in the direction indicated a wonderful sight was seen. The great tower of Albert Cathedral

appeared through the mist of rain, and the sun shone on the great copper statue of the Blessed Virgin and the Child, which dominated the countryside for miles around, and, laid prostrate by German gunners, was now lying out level with the top of the tower. Thus that symbol of faith, though fallen, was not overthrown. Its roots in the pedestal were firm and strong. The Virgin Mother, facing downwards, still held the Infant Jesus scathless in her outstretched hands, as if showing Him the devastation below, ready to be uplifted again on the day of Christianity's victory. The piety of the battalion was kindled by that strange and moving spectacle. Quickly responsive always to things that appeal to the imagination, the men felt as if they were witnesses of a miracle, and with one accord they took off their helmets and cheered and cheered again.

Though it is an unusual thing for the Commander-in-Chief to give in his dispatches the names of the troops who took part in a particular engagement, Sir Douglas Haig makes special mention of the Irish Brigade in his message announcing that Guillamont had fallen. "The Irish regiments which took part in the capture of Guillamont on September 3 behaved," he says, "with the greatest dash and gallantry, and took no small share in the success gained that day."

September 3 was a Sunday. On the night before the battle the Irish troops selected for the attack on Guillamont bivouacked on the bare side of a hill. They were the Connaughts, the Royal Irish, the Munsters and the Leinsters. The rain had ceased, but the ground was everywhere deep in mud, the trenches were generally flooded and the shell holes full of water. It was a bleak and desolate scene, relieved only here and there by the sparkle of the little fires around which the platoons clustered. Just as the men of one of the battalions were preparing to wrap

themselves in their greatcoats and lie down for the rest which they might be able to snatch in such a situation, the Catholic chaplain came over the side of the hill and right to the centre of the camp. "In a moment he was surrounded by the men," writes Major Redmond. "They came to him without orders—they came gladly and willingly, and they hailed his visit with plain delight. He spoke to them in the simple, homely language which they liked. He spoke of the sacrifice which they had made in freely and promptly leaving their homes to fight for a cause which was the cause of religion, freedom and civilisation. He reminded them that in this struggle they were most certainly defending the homes and the relations and friends they had left behind them in Ireland. It was a simple, yet most moving address, and deeply affected the soldiers." Major Redmond goes on to say : "When the chaplain had finished his address he signed to the men to kneel, and administered to them the General Absolution given in times of emergency. The vast majority of the men present knelt, and those of other faith stood by in attitudes of reverent respect. The chaplain then asked the men to recite with him the Rosary. It was most wonderful the effect produced as hundreds and hundreds of voices repeated the prayers and recited the words, 'Pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen.' At the dawn Masses were said by the chaplains of all the battalions in the open, and most of the officers and men received Holy Communion."

The attack was timed to begin at noon. All the morning the war-pipes of these Leinsters, Munsters and Connaughts gave out inspiring Irish tunes—"Brian Boru's March," that was played at the Battle of Clontarf in the eleventh century when the Danish invaders were driven from Ireland; "The White Cockade," the Jacobite marching tune of the first Irish

Brigade in the service of France; "The Wearin' o' the Green," one of the finest expressions of a country's devotion to an ideal; and "A Nation Once Again," thrilling with the hopes of the future. The pipers strode up and down, green ribbons streaming from their pipes, sending forth these piercing invocations to ancient Irish heroes, to venerable saints of the land, to the glories and sorrows of Ireland, to the love of home, to the faith and aspirations of the race, to come to the support of the men in the fight. And what of the men as they waited in the assembly trenches for the word? The passage from Shakespeare's *Henry V* best conveys their mood: "I see ye stand like greyhounds in the leash straining upon the start."

At twelve o'clock the battalions emerged from the trenches. Numbers of the men had tied to their rifles little green flags with the yellow harp. Like the English infantry associated with them, the Irish advanced in the open snaky lines in which such attacks are always delivered. But there was a striking difference—noted by the war correspondents—in the pace and impetus of the Irish and the English. Mr. Beach Thomas of the *Daily Mail* says: "It gives, I think, a satisfying sense of the variety and association of talent in the new Army to picture these dashing Irish troops careering across the open while the ground was being methodically cleared and settled behind them by English riflemen." "The English riflemen who fought on their right had more solidity in their way of going about the business," says Mr. Philip Gibbs of the *Daily Chronicle*, "but they were so inspired by the sight of the Irish dash and by the sound of the Irish pipes that those who were in support, under orders to stand and hold the first German line, could hardly be restrained from following on." The English advance was calm, restrained, deliberate, infused by a spirit of determination that glowed rather than

flamed. A breath of fire seemed to sweep through the Irish. From first to last they kept up a boisterous jog-trot charge. "It was like a human avalanche," was the description given by the English troops who fought with them.

The country across which this dash was made was pitted with innumerable shell holes, most of them of great width and depth and all full of water and mud. A Munster Fusilier graphically likened the place to a net, in his Irish way—"all holes tied together." So the men, as they advanced, stumbled over the inequalities of the ground, or slipped and tripped in the soft, sticky earth. It was a scene, too, of the most clamorous and frightful violence. The shells were like fiends of the air, flying with horrid shrieks or moans on the wings of the wind, ignoring one another and intent only on dropping down to earth and striking the life out of their human prey. Blasts of fire and flying bits of metal also swept the plain.

There is a loud detonation, and when the smoke clears away not a trace is seen of the ten or dozen comrades that a moment before were rushing forward like a Rugby pack after the ball. They have all been blown to the four winds of heaven. "Jim, I'm hit," cries a lad, as if boastingly, on feeling a blow on his chest. He twirls round about like a spinning top and then topples face downward. His body has been perforated by a rifle bullet. A shell explodes and a man falls. He laughs, thinking he has been tripped up by a tree root or piece of wire. Both his legs are broken. Another shell bursts. A Leinsterman sees a companion lifted violently off his feet, stripped of his clothes, and swept several yards before he is dashed violently to the ground. He goes over to his friend and can see no sign of a wound on the quite naked body. But his friend will never lift up his head again. The blasting force of the high explosive,

the tremendous concussion of the air, has knocked the life out of him. "Good-bye, Joe, and may God have mercy on your soul," the Leinsterman says to himself, and, as he dashes on again he thinks, "Sure, it may be my own turn next." It is that which assuages the grief of a soldier for a dead comrade, or soon ousts it altogether from his mind.

Khaki and grey-clad forms were lying everywhere in the frightfully distorted postures assumed by the killed in action—arms twisted, legs doubled together, heads askew. Some had their lips turned outward, showing their teeth in a horrible sneer. Their mouths had been distended in agony. Others had a fixed expression of infinite sadness, as if in a lucid moment before death there came a thought of home. More horrifying still was the foul human wreckage of former battles—heads and trunks and limbs trodden under foot in the mud, and emitting a fearful stench.

The priests followed in the wake of the troops to give the consolations of religion to the dying. They saw heartrending sights. One of them, describing his experiences, says: "I was standing about a hundred yards away, watching a party of my men crossing the valley, when I saw the earth under their feet open, and twenty men disappear in a cloud of smoke, while a column of stones and clay was shot a couple of hundred feet into the air. A big German shell, by the merest chance, had landed in the middle of the party. I rushed down the slope, getting a most unmerciful whack between the shoulders. I gave them all a General Absolution, scraped the clay from the faces of a couple of buried men who were not wounded, and then anointed as many of the poor lads as I could reach. Two of them had no faces to anoint, and others were ten feet under the clay, but a few were living still. By this time half a dozen volunteers had run up, and were digging the buried men out. We

dug like demons for our lads' lives, and our own, to tell the truth, for every few minutes another 'iron pill' from a Krupp gun would come tearing down the valley." Another priest says: "Many of the wounded were just boys, and it was extraordinary how they bore pain, which must have been intense. Very few murmurings were heard. One young man said to me, 'Oh, father, it is hard to die so far from home in the wilds of France.' Certainly the fair land of France just here did seem wild, with the trees all torn and riven with shot, and the earth on every side ploughed with huge shell holes."

But the Irish troops swept on. Nothing could stop them—neither their fallen comrades, nor the groans of the wounded, nor the abominably mangled dead; and the blasts of fire and iron and steel which the enemy let loose beat in vain against their valour and resolution. "'Tis God's truth I'm telling you," a Leinsterman remarked to me, "when I say we couldn't stop ourselves in the height of our hurry, we were that mad." In fact, they had captured Guillamont before they were aware of it. "Where's that blessed village we've got to take?" they shouted, as they looked round and saw not a stick or a stone. "We're in it, boys," replied a captain of the Munsters as he planted a green flag with a yellow harp on the dust heap which his map indicated was once the centre of Guillamont, and the Irishmen, mightily pleased with themselves, raised a wild shout.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BRIGADE'S POUNCE ON GUINCHY

#### GALLANT BOY OFFICERS OF THE DUBLIN FUSILIERS

GUINCHY fell within the same week as Guillamont. It was stormed on the following Saturday, September 9. The village had been taken two or three times previously—some accounts say four—by the British and recaptured each time by the Germans. But the grip of the Irish Brigade could not be relaxed. Standing on a hill 500 feet high, Guinchy was one of the most important enemy strongholds on the Somme, particularly for artillery. It had been fortified with the accumulated skill of eighteen months' labour by the German engineers. It was well protected by guns. Picked troops—the Bavarians—defended it. The Germans, according to a captured officer, believed that Guinchy could not be taken. “But,” he added, “you attacked us with devils, not men. No one could withstand them.” The capture of the place was therefore a good day's work. It stands solely to the credit of the Irish Brigade. They did it all by themselves.

The attack was mainly delivered from the direction of Guillamont. All through the week, for five days and nights, most of the Irish battalions had lain in the trenches—connected shell craters for the most part—under heavy artillery fire. In these circumstances they could get nothing hot to eat. They subsisted mainly on the iron rations of bully beef and biscuit, which formed part of each man's fighting equipment,

and a little water. As for sleep, they were unable to get more than disturbed and unrefreshing snatches. Yet they were as full of spirit and had nerves as unshaken as if they had come fresh from billets, and they were as eager for a fight as ever.

In preparation for the advance, a thunderstorm of British fire and steel broke over the German trenches. The splitting, tearing crashes of the mighty "heavies" lying miles back; their firing accuracy, the penetrating power of their shells, had a heartening influence on the men. "Ah, those guns," said an officer of the Royal Irish Regiment—"their effect, spiritual and temporal, is wonderful. Your own makes you defiant of the very devil; the enemy's put the fear of God into you." The German lines were blotted out by smoke and flying soil. The ground rocked and swayed. It was like a heavy sea, only the waves were of earth.

The whistle sounded at four o'clock, and up and over went the men in a mass. Like the country before Guillamont, the country before Guinchy was slashed and gouged and seared, and the air had the sickening taste of gunpowder, poison gas and the corruption of the body. The men walked or ran, in broken array, in and out of the shell holes or over the narrow ledges that separated them. Soon the enemy got the range. Severed limbs, heads, arms and legs, and often the whole body, were flung high into the air. It was a dreadful scene. The noise, too, was appalling, what with the roaring of the guns, the bursting of the shells, and, not less, the frenzied yells of the charging masses. There is no shout in the mêlée of battle so fierce as the Irish shout. Every man is like "Stentor of the brazen voice," whose shout, as Homer says in the *Iliad*, "was as the shout of fifty men." So the Irish shouted as they dashed forward, partly in relief of their feelings, and partly in the hope of confusing and dismaying their adversaries. It was an amazing

martial feat, that charge of the Irish Brigade at Guinchy. Within just eight minutes they had overrun the intervening ground and captured the village. Nothing stopped nor stayed them. They did not pause to lie down for a while and let the bullets and shrapnel fly over them. Many were seen, as the advance proceeded, lying huddled on the ground as if taking shelter. They had taken shelter, indeed, but it was behind a stronger thing than a mound of earth—and that is death.

The most graphic and thrilling narrative of the engagement is given in a letter written home by a second lieutenant of one of the Irish battalions. They were in reserve, five or six hundred yards behind the first line, who were in occupation of the rising slope nearer to Guinchy. It was about four o'clock when they were ordered to move up so as to reinforce the first line. They got up in the nick of time, just as the great charge had begun, and they saw a sight which the officer says stirred and thrilled them to the depths of their souls. "Mere words," he says, "must fail to convey anything like a true picture of the scene, but it is burned into the memory of all those who were there and saw it. Between the outer fringe of Guinchy and the front line of our own trenches is No Man's Land, a wilderness of pits so close together that you could ride astraddle the partitions between any two of them. As you look half right, obliquely down along No Man's Land, you behold a great host of yellow-coated men rise out of the earth and surge forward and upward in a torrent—not in extended order, as you might expect, but in one mass. There seems to be no end to them. Just when you think the flood is subsiding, another wave comes surging up the bend towards Guinchy. We joined in on the left. There was no time for us any more than the others to get into extended order. We formed another stream con-

verging on the others at the summit." He goes on to give a wonderful impression of the spirit of the men—their fearlessness and exuberance which nothing could daunt. "By this time we were all wildly excited. Our shouts and yells alone must have struck terror into the Huns. They were firing their machine-guns down the slope. Their shells were falling here, there and everywhere. But there was no wavering in the Irish host. We couldn't run. We advanced at a steady walking pace, stumbling here and there, but going ever onward and upward. That numbing dread had now left me completely. Like the others, I was intoxicated with the glory of it all. I can remember shouting and bawling to the men of my platoon, who were only too eager to go on."

The officer mentions a curious circumstance which throws more light on that most interesting subject—the state of the mind in battle. He says the din must have been deafening—he learned afterwards that it could be heard miles away—and yet he had a confused remembrance only of anything in the way of noise. How Guinchy was reached and what it was like is thus described: "How long we were in crossing No Man's Land I don't know. It could not have been more than five minutes, yet it seemed much longer. We were now well up to the Boche. We had to clamber over all manner of obstacles—fallen trees, beams, great mounds of brick and rubble—in fact, over the ruins of Guinchy. It seems like a nightmare to me now. I remember seeing comrades falling round me. My sense of hearing returned to me, for I became conscious of a new sound—namely, the pop, pop, pop, pop of machine-guns, and the continuous crackling of rifle fire. By this time all units were mixed up, but they were all Irishmen. They were cheering and cheering like mad. There was a machine-gun playing on us near by, and we all made for it."

Through the centre of the smashed and battered village ran a deep trench. It was occupied by about two hundred Germans, who continued to fire rifle and machine-gun even after the Irish had appeared on all sides, scrambling over the piles of masonry, bent and twisted wood and metal and broken furniture. "At this moment we caught our first sight of the Huns," the officer continues. "They were in a trench of sorts, which ran in and out among the ruins. Some of them had their hands up. Others were kneeling and holding their arms out to us. Still others were running up and down the trench, distracted, as if they didn't know which way to go, but as we got closer they went down on their knees, too." In battle the Irish are fierce and terrible to the enemy, and in victory most magnanimous. "To the everlasting good name of the Irish soldiery," the officer says, "not one of these Huns, some of whom had been engaged in slaughtering our men up to the very last moment, was killed. I did not see a single instance of a prisoner being shot or bayoneted. When you remember that our men were worked up to a frenzy of excitement, this crowning act of mercy to their foes is surely to their eternal credit. They could feel pity even in their rage." He adds: "It is with a sense of pride that I can write this of our soldiers."

Many incidents in which smiles and tears were commingled took place in the nests of dug-outs and cellars among the ruins of the village. The Dublin Fusiliers lost most of their officers in the advance. Many of them were the victims of snipers. In the village the direction of affairs was in the hands of young subalterns. The manliness and decision of these boys were wonderful. One of them captured, with the help of a single sergeant, a German officer and twenty men whom they had come upon on rounding the corner of a trench. The German officer sur-

rendered in great style. He stood to attention, gave a clinking salute, and said in perfect English, "Sir, myself, this other officer and twenty men are your prisoners." The subaltern said, "Right you are, old chap!" and they shook hands. Hundreds of the defenders of Guinchy had fled. "An' if they did itself, you couldn't blame them," said a wounded Dublin Fusilier to me. "We came on jumping mad, all roaring and bawling, an' our bayonets stretched out, terribly fierce, in front of us, that maybe 'tis ourselves would get up and run like blazes likewise if 'twere the other way about."

Hot and impulsive in all things, the Irishmen were bent on advancing into the open country beyond Guinchy in chase of the retreating Germans. The officers had frantically to blow their whistles and shout and gesticulate to arrest this onward rush of the men to destruction in the labyrinth of the enemy supports which had escaped bombardment. "Very frankly the men proclaimed their discontent," says the special correspondent of *The Times*, "with what they called the 'diplomacy' which forbade them to go where they wanted—namely, "to hell and beyond, if there are any Germans hiding on the other side."

The only cases of desertion in the Irish Division occurred on the night before the storming of Guinchy. It is a deliciously comic incident. Three servants of the staff mess of one of the brigades disappeared. They left a note saying that, as they had missed Guillamont, they must have a hand in the taking of Guinchy. "If all right, back to-morrow. Very sorry," they added. Sure enough they were found in the fighting line.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HONOURS AND DISTINCTIONS FOR THE IRISH BRIGADE

#### HOW LIEUTENANT HOLLAND OF THE LEINSTERS WON THE V.C.

MANY decorations and rewards were won by the Irish Brigade. The Honours Book of the Brigade contained, at the end of 1916, about one thousand names of officers and men, presented by Major-General Hickie with the parchment certificate for gallant conduct and devotion to duty in the field. Over three hundred military decorations were gained. Two high Russian honours were also awarded—the Cross of St. George, Second Class, to Lance-Corporal T. McMahon, Munster Fusiliers, and the Cross of St. George, Fourth Class, to Lance-Sergeant L. Courtenay, Dublin Fusiliers. The list of decorations is so long that only a select few of those won by officers of the Brigade for gallant conduct in the capture of Guillamont and Guinchy can be given. Father Maurice O'Connell, the senior chaplain of the Brigade, got the Distinguished Service Order. Father Wrafter, S.J., and Father Doyle, S.J., got the Military Cross. All the Chaplains of the Division were indeed splendid. The others are: Fathers Browne, S.J., Burke, Cotter, O'Connor, and FitzMaurice, S.J. The official records show that the D.S.O. was also awarded to the following—

"Temporary Captain (temporary Major) Robert James Abbot Tamplin, Connaught Rangers.—He led his company with the greatest courage and determination, and was instrumental in capturing the position. He was wounded."

"Second-Lieutenant Cyril Paxman Tiptaft, Connaught Rangers, Special Reserve.—With his platoon he consolidated and held for fourteen hours a strong point, thus preventing the enemy from getting behind our advanced positions, which they tried to do again and again. He set a fine example to his men, and kept up their spirits in spite of heavy casualties."

"Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel George Alexander McLean Buckley, Leinster Regiment.—He led his battalion with the greatest courage and determination. He has on many occasions done very fine work."

"Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel Edwin Henry Charles Patrick Bellingham, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—He took command of the two leading battalions when the situation was critical, and displayed the greatest determination under shell and machine-gun fire. The success of the operation was largely due to his quick appreciation of the situation, and his rapid consolidation of the position."

"Temporary Captain John Patrick Hunt, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—He formed and held a defensive flank for ten hours, until relieved, under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire, thus frustrating the enemy's attempt to turn the flank."

"Major Walter McClelland Crosbie, Royal Munster Fusiliers.—He led two companies with the greatest courage and initiative. Later, he organised the position with great skill, displaying great coolness throughout. He was wounded."

### The Military Crosses won included the following—

"Captain William Joseph Rivers Reardon, Royal Irish Regiment, Special Reserve.—He led his men with great dash, and during a counter-attack, though wounded, stayed with a party of men in a most exposed position, till he could carry on no longer."

"Lieutenant Edward Alexander Stoker, Royal Irish Regiment, Special Reserve.—With two or three men he went under heavy shell fire, and captured some enemy snipers. During the enemy counter-attack he brought a party of men across the open to the threatened flank, under heavy fire."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Thomas Adams, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.—For conspicuous gallantry when leading a raid. He entered the enemy's trenches, and it was

largely due to his skill and determination that the raid was successful."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Hugh Abbot Green, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.—When two senior company commanders had become casualties, he took command and led the men forward, capturing a portion of the final objective, which had been missed by the first attacking troops. He then advanced eighty yards, and, though himself wounded, consolidated his position."

"Temporary Captain Victor Henry Parr, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.—He rallied men of different units in a wood during an enemy counter-attack, and, though wounded, led them forward and beat off the attack."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Charles Lovell Naylor, Royal Irish Fusiliers.—He took command of his company when the other officers had become casualties, and showed great pluck when driving off a counter-attack. He then advanced and reoccupied one of our advanced posts."

"Temporary Captain Thomas Francis O'Donnell, Royal Irish Fusiliers.—In the attack he dashed forward and led the battalion the whole way. He was first into the enemy's position, where he did fine work consolidating the defences."

"Lieutenant Valentine Joseph Farrell, Leinster Regiment, Special Reserve.—When the senior officers of two companies had become casualties in the firing line he took command, and, by his fine example, kept his men together under intense fire."

"Captain Charles Carleton Barry, Leinster Regiment, Special Reserve.—For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when returning with another officer from reconnaissance. The latter officer was severely wounded. Although wounded in the arm, Captain Barry succeeded in pulling his comrade into a shell hole, and dressing his wound. He finally succeeded in getting the officer back to our trench. These actions were carried out under heavy machine-gun and snipers' fire."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Nicholas Hurst, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—He organised a party to rush two machine-guns, which were holding up the advance, and, when the first party failed, he organised a second, which succeeded. The strong point was captured and two officers and thirty men made prisoners."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Harold Arthur Jowett, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—For conspicuous gallantry during an attack, moving up and down his line under heavy fire,

encouraging his men and setting a fine example to all ranks. He displayed considerable coolness and skill in maintaining his position until the line was re-established."

"Temporary Lieutenant William Kee, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—Although twice wounded, he continued to lead his men during an attack until ordered back to the dressing station. He has several times carried out reconnaissance work most efficiently."

"Temporary Lieutenant Eugene Patrick Quigley, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.—Though wounded, he brought a machine-gun into action against some enemy who were collecting to repel our attack. Not finding a suitable rest for one of his guns, he had it placed on his shoulder, where it opened fire."

"Temporary Second-Lieutenant Dennis Joseph Baily, Royal Munster Fusiliers.—When all the officers round him had become casualties he took command and led the men forward with great dash and ability."

"Temporary Lieutenant Labouchere Hillyer Bainbridge-Bell, Royal Munster Fusiliers. He continually repaired breaks in the line during several days of heavy shelling, never hesitating to go out when the wires were cut. He was several times smothered in debris, and was much bruised."

"Temporary Captain Cecil William Chandler, Royal Munster Fusiliers.—Although wounded, he led his men and beat off repeated enemy attacks, displaying great courage and initiative throughout."

"Temporary Captain Maurice Fletcher, Royal Munster Fusiliers.—He directed a working party, close to the enemy's line, and completed his task under continuous shelling and rifle fire. He has done other fine work."

"Temporary Lieutenant Fabian Strachan Woodley, Royal Munster Fusiliers.—By his skill and determination he beat off three counter-attacks of the enemy, who were endeavouring to reach his trench. Four days later he led his men in two attacks with great pluck."

Captain Place, Royal Irish Regiment, was awarded bar to Cross he had already won.

These official records, brief and coldly phrased though they be, cannot be read without a thrill of pride in the race which produced the men. There is one other account of the winning of a Military Cross that must be specially given, for it describes the feats of "the boy hero of Guinchy," Second-Lieutenant James

Emmet Dalton, of the Dublin Fusiliers. He joined the Army in January 1916, and was only eighteen years of age when he took command and proved himself a born leader of men at Guinchy. The following is the official record, which, happily, is more extended than usual—

"At the capture of Guinchy, on the 9th of September, 1916, he displayed great bravery and leadership in action. When, owing to the loss of officers, the men of two companies were left without leaders, he took command and led these companies to their final objective. After the withdrawal of another brigade and the right flank of his battalion was in the rear, he carried out the protection of the flank, under intense fire, by the employment of machine-guns in selected commanding and successive positions. After dark, whilst going about supervising the consolidation of the position, he, with only one sergeant escorting, found himself confronted by a party of the enemy, consisting of one officer and twenty men. By his prompt determination the party were overawed and, after a few shots, threw up their arms and surrendered."

The Irish Brigade also got a second Victoria Cross at the Battle of the Somme. It was won by Lieutenant John Vincent Holland of the Leinster Regiment for most conspicuous bravery. He was born at Athy, co. Kildare, the son of John Holland, a past President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons of Ireland, was educated at the Christian Brothers' Schools, and Clongowies Wood College. At the outbreak of war he was employed in the chief mechanical engineers' department of the Central Argentine Railway at Rosario, and, hastening home, got his commission in the Leinster Regiment. For his services at the Front he received the Certificate of the Irish

Brigade. It was at Guillamont that Lieutenant Holland won the Victoria Cross. The official account of his exploits is as follows—

"For most conspicuous bravery during a heavy engagement, when, not content with bombing hostile dug-outs within the objective, he fearlessly led his bombers through our own artillery barrage and cleared a great part of the village in front. He started out with twenty-six bombers and finished up with only five, after capturing some fifty prisoners. By this very gallant action he undoubtedly broke the spirit of the enemy, and thus saved us many casualties when the battalion made a further advance. He was far from well at the time, and later had to go to hospital."

As proof of Lieutenant Holland's dash it is related that the night before the engagement he made a bet of five pounds with a brother officer that he would be first over the parapet when the order came. He won the bet, the V.C., and, in addition, he was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and of St. George of Russia.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WOODEN CROSS

DEATH OF LIEUTENANT T. M. KETTLE OF THE DUBLINS

FOR all this glory and renown the Irish Brigade had to pay a bitter price. Many a home in Ireland was made forlorn and desolate. The roads of the countryside by which the men went off to the war will be lonely and drear for ever to womenfolk, for never again will they be brightened by the returning footsteps of son or husband.

One of the most grievous losses which the Brigade sustained was the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Lenox-Conyngham of the Connaught Rangers. He came of an Ulster soldier family. He was the son of Colonel Sir W. Fitzwilliam Lenox-Conyngham of Springhill, co. Derry, was born in 1861, and three of his brothers were also serving in the Army with the rank of Colonel. He fell at the head of his battalion, which was foremost in the rush for Guillamont. "I cannot imagine a more fitting death for him," writes Captain Stephen Gwynn, M.P., who served under Colonel Lenox-Conyngham since the days the battalion was formed at Fermoy. "He was never in doubt as to how his men would acquit themselves. To us officers he said things in private which would sound a little arrogant if I quoted them—and yet they have been made good." The welfare of the men was always his first concern. Captain Gwynn relates that

on the return of the battalion one night, after a dreary day of field operations at home, the company officers, feeling very miserable, were gathered about the door of their mess-room, waiting for dinner, when the Colonel called out that their proper place was in the cook-house, seeing that the men were first served. The incident greatly rejoiced the heart of Captain Gwynn, for, having served in the ranks, he knew that the officer who is best served by the men is he who places their comfort and well-being before his own. In France, whenever any compliment was paid to Colonel Lenox-Conyngham, he could not be content until, with frank generosity, he passed it on to the company officers. "It is you who have done it," he would say. "He was right too," says Captain Gwynn. "We did the work, and no men were ever less interfered with; but we did it as we had been taught to do it, and because we were kept up to it at every point."

I can only mention a few typical cases of the officers of the Irish Brigade killed at Guillamont and Guinchy. Lieutenant E. R. F. Becher, of the Munster Fusiliers, was but nineteen, and the only child of E. W. Becher, Lismore, co. Waterford. He was descended in direct line from Colonel Thomas Becher, who was aide-de-camp to King William at the Battle of the Boyne, and was on that occasion presented by the King with his watch, which is still an heirloom in the family. Captain H. R. Lloyd of the Royal Irish Regiment was descended from the ensign who carried the colours of the Coldstream Guards at Waterloo. He was educated at Drogheda Grammar School, and was at business in Brazil when the war broke out. Lieutenant J. T. Kennedy of the Inniskillings was editor of the *Northern Standard*, Monaghan. Lieutenant Charles P. Close of the Dublin Fusiliers was a native of Limerick, and conducted a teaching academy in that city. At the time

he volunteered he was the commanding officer of the City Regiment of National Volunteers. Another officer of the National Volunteers was Lieutenant Hugh Maguire, son of Dr. Conor Maguire of Claremorris. He was a university student when he volunteered for service in response to the national call, and got a commission in the Connaught Rangers, but was temporarily attached to the Inniskillings when he was killed. Another gallant youth was Lieutenant Thomas Maxwell, Dublin Fusiliers, son of Surgeon Patrick W. Maxwell of Dublin, who was in his twenty-first year when he fell while in temporary command of the leading company of his battalion in the taking of Guinchy. Then there is Second-Lieutenant Bevan Nolan. He was the third son of Walter Nolan, Clerk of the Crown for South Tipperary. When the war broke out he was in Canada, and, returning at once, obtained a commission in the Royal Irish Regiment. He was a very gallant young officer, and most popular with his comrades. In the camp the general verdict was : "Nolan is destined for the V.C., or to die at the head of his platoon." He was only twenty-one years of age, and a splendid type of young Tipperary.

The greatest loss in individual brain-power which Ireland suffered was through the death of that brilliant man of letters and economist, Lieutenant T. M. Kettle of the Dublin Fusiliers. He was a son of Andrew J. Kettle, a Dublin farmer, one of the founders of the Land League, and a member of the executive who in 1881, on the arrest of the leaders, Parnell, Davitt and Dillon, signed the No-Rent Manifesto addressed to the tenants. In the House of Commons, where he sat as a Nationalist from 1906 to 1910, young Kettle made a reputation for eloquence and humour of quite a fresh vein. He resigned on his appointment as Professor of National Economics in the National University of Ireland. He was married to Margaret, daughter of David Sheehy, M.P., whose sister is the

widow of Sheehy Skeffington, shot by the military in the Dublin Rebellion.

In public life Kettle was a vivid figure, and very Irish. At first he belonged to the extreme, or irreconcilable section of Nationalists, noted for a cast of thought or bias of reasoning which finds that no good for Ireland can come out of England. When England was fighting the Boers he distributed anti-recruiting leaflets in the streets of Dublin. To his constituents in East Tyrone he once declared that Ireland had no national independence to protect against foreign invasion. "I confess," he added, referring to the over-taxation of Ireland, "I see many reasons for preferring German invasion to British methods of finance in Ireland." But increased knowledge brought wider views. As a result of his experiences in Parliament, where he found in all parties a genuine desire to do what was best for Ireland according to their lights, he approached the consideration of Irish questions with a remarkably tolerant, broad-minded and practical spirit. When the war broke out there was no more powerful champion of the Allies. The invasion of Belgium, which he had witnessed as a newspaper correspondent, moved him to an intense hatred of Germany, and, throwing himself with all his energy into the recruiting campaign in Ireland, he addressed no fewer than two hundred meetings, bringing thousands of his countrymen to the Colours. One of his epigrammatic and pointed sayings—suggested by the ill-favour of absentee landlordism of old in Ireland—was: "Nowadays the absentee is the man who stays at home."

In a letter written to a friend on the night his battalion was moving up to the Somme, Kettle said he had had two chances of leaving—one on account of sickness and the other to take a Staff appointment. "I have chosen to stay with my comrades," he writes. "The bombardment, destruction and bloodshed are

beyond all imagination. Nor did I ever think that valour of simple men could be quite as beautiful as that of my Dublin Fusiliers." On the eve of his death he wrote to his wife another fine tribute to his battalion. "I have never," he says, "seen anything in my life so beautiful as the clean and, so to say, radiant manner of my Dublin Fusiliers. There is something divine in men like that."

Kettle fell in the storming of Guinchy. His friend and comrade, Lieutenant James Emmet Dalton, M.C., states that they were both in the trenches in Trones Wood opposite Guillamont, on the morning of September 8th, discussing the loss of two hundred men and seven officers which the battalion had sustained the day before from German shell fire, when an orderly arrived with a note for each of them, saying, "Be in readiness. Battalion will take up A and B position in front of Guinchy to-night at 12 midnight." Lieutenant Dalton continues: "I was with Tom when he advanced to the position that night, and the stench of the dead that covered our road was so awful that we both used some foot-powder on our faces. When we reached our objective we dug ourselves in, and then, at five o'clock p.m. on the 9th, we attacked Guinchy. I was just behind Tom when we went over the top. He was in a bent position, and a bullet got over a steel waistcoat that he wore and entered his heart. Well, he only lasted about one minute, and he had my crucifix in his hands. Then Boyd took all the papers and things out of Tom's pockets in order to keep them for Mrs. Kettle, but poor Boyd was blown to atoms in a few minutes. The Welsh Guards buried Mr. Kettle's remains. Tom's death has been a big blow to the regiment, and I am afraid that I could not put in words my feelings on the subject." In another letter Lieutenant Dalton says: "Mr. Kettle died a grand and holy death—the death of a soldier and a true Christian."

Lieutenant Kettle left his political testament in a letter to his wife and in verses addressed to his little daughter. The letter, written a few days before his death, with directions that it was to be sent to Mrs. Kettle if he were killed, says—

"Had I lived I had meant to call my next book on the relations of Ireland and England *The Two Fools; A Tragedy of Errors*. It has needed all the folly of England and all the folly of Ireland to produce the situation in which our unhappy country is now involved. I have mixed much with Englishmen and with Protestant Ulstermen, and I know that there is no real or abiding reason for the gulfs, salter than the sea, that now dismember the natural alliance of both of them with us Irish Nationalists. It needs only a Fiat Lux of a kind very easily compassed to replace the unnatural by the natural. In the name, and by the seal, of the blood given in the last two years I ask for Colonial Home Rule for Ireland, a thing essential in itself, and essential as a prologue to the reconstruction of the Empire. Ulster will agree. And I ask for the immediate withdrawal of martial law in Ireland, and an amnesty for all Sinn Fein prisoners. If this war has taught us anything it is that great things can be done only in a great way."

The lines, "To my daughter Betty—The Gift of Love," were written "In the field before Guillamont, Somme, September 4, 1916—

"In wiser days, my darling rosebud, blown  
To beauty proud as was your mother's prime—  
In that desired, delayed, incredible time  
You'll ask why I abandoned you, my own,  
And the dear breast that was your baby's throne,  
To dice with death, and, oh! they'll give you rhyme  
And reason; one will call the thing sublime,  
And one decry it in a knowing tone.  
So here, while the mad guns curse overhead,  
And tired men sigh, with mud for couch and floor,  
Know that we fools, now with the foolish dead,  
Died not for Flag, nor King, nor Emperor,  
But for a dream, born in a herdsman shed  
And for the secret Scripture of the poor."

These young leaders have won the wooden cross—the symbol of the supreme sacrifice they made that

others might live; the symbol, also, of eternal peace for themselves—the wooden cross which marks their graves. From north, south, east and west of Ireland, of differing creeds, of opposing political opinions—these men of the Irish Brigade and the Ulster Division—they lie, as they fought, side by side, comrades in a noble cause. It is sad to think of the many rare intelligences, ardent and glowing spirits, which are quenched for ever in the little cemeteries that have sprung up along the Allied Front. The loss to Ireland is incalculable. But gain might come from it, which, weighed in the balance, would not be found wanting, if only the solemn lesson which it teaches were brought home to all: that one in Irish name, as one in Irish fame, are the northerners and southerners who died in France for the liberation of humanity.

Major-General Hickie—as mindful of the memories of those of his men who have fallen as of the well-being of those still in the fighting ranks—erected as a memorial to the dead of the Irish Brigade a statue in white marble of Our Lady of Victories in a town of the district. Another striking proof of his esteem for the men is afforded by the following Order which he issued on December 18, 1916—

"To-day is the anniversary of the landing of the Irish Division in France. The Divisional Commander wishes to express his appreciation of the spirit which has been shown by all ranks during the past year. He feels that the Division has earned the right to adopt the motto which was granted by the King of France to the Irish Brigade, which served in this country for a hundred years: 'Everywhere and always faithful.' With the record of the past, with the memory of our gallant dead, with this motto to live up to, and with our trust in God, we can face the future with confidence."

GOD SAVE THE KING.

## CHAPTER XV

### MORE IRISH HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS

#### DEEDS OF THE HIGHEST MERIT AND LUSTRE

IN this war Victoria Crosses are being won in remarkably large numbers, despite dangers and sufferings immeasurably greater than were ever conceived of in any war of the past. It would seem, indeed, as if human nature is capable of withstanding any test to which it can conceivably be put. "Man," said Mr. Lloyd George, "is the bravest animal that God has made; and, in comparison with him, the lion is an arrant coward."

Up to the end of 1916 the war has contributed 221 additional names to that golden chronicle of valorous deeds—The Roll of the Victoria Cross. Of these as many as thirty-five are Irishmen. That is a most glorious achievement, having regard to the proportion of Irishmen in the Army. The number, taking the Irish regiments, the Irishmen in English and Scottish regiments and in the forces of the different Dominions, is altogether about 500,000; and estimating the entire strength of the Army to be 5,000,000, it will be seen that if the other nationalities won Victoria Crosses in the same ratio to their numbers as the Irish, the Roll of the present war would contain not 221, but 350 names. To put it in another way, the Irish on a basis of numbers would be entitled only to twenty-two

of the 221 Victoria Crosses that have actually been awarded.

But however that may be, the Irish part of the Roll, as it stands, will be found to be a very thrilling record of the gallantry of Irish officers and men in the various theatres of war. Twenty of the thirty-five Irish heroes of the Victoria Cross are dealt with in the first series of *The Irish at the Front*. Of the remaining fifteen, the deeds of four are recounted in the exploits of the Ulster Division; one, in the story of the Irish Brigade—the second Cross that fell to the Brigade having been won by an English officer—and the other ten are dealt with here.

Sub-Lieutenant Arthur Walderne St. Clair Tisdall, V.C., of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, was another of the many gallant Irishmen who distinguished themselves at the memorable first landing at Gallipoli on April 25, 1915, when the Munsters and the Dublins won imperishable renown. The announcement of the award of the Victoria Cross to Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall was not made until March 31, 1916. The following official statement explains the delay—

“ During the landing from the ss. *River Clyde* at V Beach, in the Gallipoli Peninsula, on April 25, 1915, Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall, hearing wounded men on the beach calling for assistance, jumped into the water, and, pushing a boat in front of him, went to their rescue. He was, however, obliged to obtain help, and took with him on two trips Leading Seaman Malin, and on other trips Chief Petty Officer Perring and Leading Seamen Curtiss and Parkinson. In all Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall made four or five trips between the ship and the shore, and was thus responsible for rescuing many wounded men under heavy and accurate fire. Owing to the fact that Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall and the platoon under his orders were on detached service at the time, and that this officer was killed in action on May 6, it has now only been possible to obtain complete information as to the individuals who took part in this gallant act.”

Sub-Lieutenant Tisdall came of a well-known Irish family, the Tisdalls of Charlesfort, who have been established in co. Meath since the year 1668. The late head of the family, Major Tisdall of the Irish Guards, fell guarding the retreat of the British Army in France in September 1914. The volume of *Memoirs and Poems of A. W. St. C. Tisdall, V.C.*, by Mrs. M. L. Tisdall, states that among his ancestors and relatives on both sides were "Crusaders, Royalists, who lost everything—even their family name—for King Charles I; Scotch Covenanters and French Huguenots, who had been driven from their own countries for their faith's sake; Irish patriots who fought at the Battle of the Boyne, a Danish Diplomatist who had danced with Queen Marie-Antoinette; an ancestress who is said to have fired the first cannon at the siege of Gibraltar; a famous Attorney-General for Ireland; a brilliant and versatile Cathedral Chancellor, a Bishop, three missionaries, and many university, military and naval men." He was born at Bombay on July 21, 1890, his father—the Rev. Dr. St. Clair Tisdall (now of St. George's Vicarage, Deal)—being then in charge of the Mohammedan mission of the Church Missionary Society. He was educated at Bedford School from 1900 to 1909, when he left as Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he had a distinguished career, culminating in the winning of the Chancellor's Gold Medal in the university in 1913, after which he entered the Home Civil Service. On the outbreak of war he was called to the Colours as an A.B. of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, of which he had been a member for some time previously. He served in the ranks in the Antwerp expedition, and was afterwards given a commission. By this time, the memoirs tell us, "he had acquired great self-control, and had practically conquered two of his Irish handicaps—viz. a hot temper and a certain carelessness,

or casualness, in business. Latterly, the 'Tisdall temper,' as it is called in the family, only flashed out in the presence of what he considered wrong or unjust."

The following extract from a letter by an officer of the Royal Navy who took part in the landing in Gallipoli was published in *The Times* on December 6, 1916—

"It has been, unfortunately, my sad lot to write of the ending on this earth of many heroes, for I have been through much since August 1914; but I sincerely assure you that I have never seen more daring and gallant deeds performed by any man, naval or military, than those performed by the man I now know to have been Sub-Lieutenant A. W. St. Clair Tisdall, Anson Battalion, R.N.V.R., at the landing from the *River Clyde* on that terrible 'V' Beach. Throughout the afternoon of April 25 a boat containing an officer (unknown to all) and three bluejackets, one of them a petty officer, was very prominent. The officer and the petty officer did the most daring of things, and were seen by very many. Time after time they visited that awful beach and brought back wounded officers and men. Darkness came on and that officer was nowhere to be found. All the petty officer and bluejackets could say was, 'He's one of those Naval Division gents.' Days and weeks passed away, and I and others never ceased trying to find out if we could who and where the unknown hero was. Over and over we discussed in the *River Clyde* and in dug-outs on the beach how those two had escaped."

It was not till June 15, 1915, that the writer of the letter learned who the hero was. He adds: "His very saving of the wounded and the handling of them was in itself the work of an artist, and a very great one." The end of this gallant officer is told by an A.B. of the Anson Battalion, who, writing to Mrs. Tisdall, says: "On May 6 the Naval Division got orders to make an advance, which we did, and advanced about a mile. When we got nicely settled in the enemy trench your son stood up on the parapet,

looking for the enemy, but was not there long before he was shot through the chest, and he never said one word." This was at the first battle of Achi Baba. Tisdall was buried on the night of May 7, a few yards from where he fell. It was a glorious death, but far from the kind of death he had dreamt of. In a poem, "Love and Death," written in 1910, he says—

" Be love for me no hoarse and headstrong tide,  
Breaking upon a deep-rent, sea-filled coast,  
But a strong river on which sea-ships glide,  
And the lush meadows are its peaceful boast.

Be death for me no parting red and raw  
Of soul and body, even in glorious pain,  
But while my children's children wait in awe,  
May peaceful darkness still the toilsome brain."

Corporal William Richard Cotter, an Irishman serving in the East Kent Regiment, got the V.C. for an act of unexampled courage and endurance. It was a deed which showed to what heights the bravery of Irish soldiers can soar. On the night of March 6, 1916, in the course of a raid made by his company along an enemy trench, his own bombing party was cut off owing to heavy casualties in the centre of the attack. The situation was so serious that Cotter went back under heavy fire to report and bring up more bombs. On the return journey his right leg was blown off close below the knee, and he was wounded in both arms. By a kind of miracle, the miracle of human courage, he did not drop down and die in the mud of the trench—mud so deep that unwounded men found it hard to walk in it—but made his way for fifty yards towards the crater where his comrades were hard pressed. He came up to Lance-Corporal Newman, who was bombing with his sector to the right of the position. Cotter called to him and directed him to bomb six feet towards where help was

most needed, and worked his way forward to the crater against which the Germans were making a violent counter-attack. Men fell rapidly under the enemy's bomb fire, but Cotter, with only one leg, and bleeding from both arms, took charge. The enemy were repulsed after two hours' fighting, and only then did Cotter allow his wounds to be bandaged. From the dug-out where he lay while the bombardment still continued he called out cheery words to the men, until he was carried down, fourteen hours later. He died of his wounds. A wonderful story of gallantry, endurance and fortitude, it would seem almost incredible were it not established by official record of the awarding of the V.C. to Corporal Cotter—

"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. When his right leg had been blown off at the knee, and he had also been wounded in both arms, he made his way unaided for fifty yards to a crater, steadied the men who were holding it, controlled their fire, issued orders, and altered the dispositions of his men to meet a fresh counter-attack by the enemy. For two hours he held his position, and only allowed his wounds to be roughly dressed when the attack had quieted down. He could not be moved back for fourteen hours, and during all this time had a cheery word for all who passed him. There is no doubt that his magnificent courage helped greatly to save a critical situation."

Cotter was born at Sandgate, near Folkestone, of Irish parents who came from Limerick, and was thirty-four years of age. He was educated at the Catholic School, Folkestone. Always fond of adventure, he ran away to sea as a boy. He then enlisted in the Army, and, after twelve years in the Buffs, came out on the Reserve in 1914, and was employed by the Sandgate Council. He was called up at the outbreak of war. He had lost an eye as the result of an accident, but nevertheless was sent on active service, and this disability enhances the extraordinary heroism of

his deed. He was the eldest of six sons, one of whom was killed in France, one was in the Navy, one in Salonika, and another died after serving in the South African War. The chaplain of his regiment wrote to his parents informing them of his death, and said his last words were "Good-bye, God bless them all." Cotter was previously recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal in December 1915.

Thomas Hughes, of the Connaught Rangers, got the V.C. for most conspicuous bravery and determination. The official record adds: "He was wounded in an attack, but returned at once to the firing line after having his wounds dressed. Later, seeing a hostile machine-gun, he dashed out in front of his company, shot the gunner, and single-handed captured the gun. Though again wounded, he brought back three or four prisoners." He was born at Corravoo, near Castleblayney, co. Monaghan, his father being a farmer, and was at the Curragh, employed as a jockey in a racing stable, until, on the outbreak of war, he joined the Connaught Rangers.

"Come on, the Dubs." This slogan was heard at a critical moment during one of the pushes on the Somme in the summer of 1916. It was shouted by Sergeant Robert Downie of the Dublin Fusiliers, and his coolness and resource in danger saved the situation and got him the Victoria Cross. The Dublins have been through many memorable campaigns and battles and have won many honours, but Sergeant Downie is the first of his regiment to win the most prized of all distinctions. The following is the official record of the award—

"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in attack. When most of the officers had become casualties, this non-commissioned officer, utterly regardless of personal danger, moved about under heavy fire and reorganised the attack, which had been temporarily checked. At the critical

moment he rushed forward alone, shouting, 'Come on, the Dubs.' This stirring appeal met with immediate response, and the line rushed forward at his call. Sergeant Downie accounted for several of the enemy, and in addition captured a machine-gun, killing the team. Though wounded early in the fight, he remained with his company, and gave valuable assistance, whilst the position was being consolidated. It was owing to Sergeant Downie's courage and initiative that this important position, which had resisted four or five previous attacks, was won."

Sergeant Downie is twenty-three years of age. He was born in Glasgow of Irish parents, both his father and mother being natives of Laurencetown, co. Down, and received his education at St. Aloysius' Catholic Schools, Springburn, Glasgow. He is one of a family of sixteen, of whom thirteen are alive. His father was employed for thirty years in the Hyde Park Locomotive Works, Glasgow, as an oiler and beltman. After leaving school young Downie served for some time in the same works as his father, and at the age of eighteen he enlisted in the Dublin Fusiliers. He went to France with the Expeditionary Force. He is married, and his wife lives with her two children at Springburn.

A wounded officer of the Dublins thus describes how Downie won the V.C.—

"For coolness and resource under danger, it would be impossible to beat Downie. The ordeal we had to go through that day was one of the most severe we have struck since the present war, and, as you know, the 'Dubs' have been in many tight corners. We had orders to advance against a position that had so far resisted all efforts of our men to take. We knew it had to be taken this time, be the cost what it might. We went over with a good heart. The men were magnificent. They faced their ordeal without the slightest sign of wavering. The enemy's fire was ploughing through our ranks. We lost heavily. In a short time there was not an officer left capable of giving directions. It was only then that the attack began to falter. At that moment the enemy

fire increased its intensity. It was many times worse than any hell I have ever heard of. The machine-gun fire of the enemy swept across the ground like great gusts of wind, and the finest troops in the world might have been pardoned for a momentary hesitation in face of such fire. Downie took the situation in. He ran along the line of shell holes in which the men were sheltering and cried out, 'Come on, the Dubs.'

"The effect was electrical. The men sprang from their cover, and under his leadership dashed to the attack on the enemy position. Their blood was now up, and there was no stopping them until the goal was reached. The immediate approach to the part of the trench they were attacking was swept by the fire of one machine-gun that galled the attacking party a lot. Downie made straight for that. Using alternately bomb, bayonet, and rifle, he wiped out the entire crew, and captured the gun, which he quickly turned on the enemy. The effect of this daring exploit was soon felt. The enemy resistance weakened, and the Dublin lads were soon in possession of the trench. It was later on, when the attack was being pressed home, that Downie was wounded. It was severe enough to justify any man in dropping out, but Downie was made of better stuff. He stuck to his men, and for the rest of the day he directed their operations with a skill and energy that defeated repeated attempts of the enemy to win back the lost ground. Throughout the very difficult operations his cheery disposition and his eye for discerning the best thing to do in given circumstances, were as good as a reinforcement to the hard-pressed Irishmen."

Captain John A. Sinton, Indian Medical Service, was awarded the Victoria Cross, after the action at Shaikh Saad in Mesopotamia. The official record is as follows—

"For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty. Although shot through both arms and through the side he refused to go to hospital, and remained as long as daylight lasted attending to his duties under very heavy fire. In three previous actions Captain Sinton displayed the utmost bravery."

Captain Sinton was born in Lisburn, co. Antrim, and is thirty-one years of age. He is a member of a well-known Quaker family. As a boy he went to the

Memorial School in Lisburn, named after the heroic Brigadier-General, John Nicholson, of the Indian Mutiny, and afterwards attended the Royal Belfast Academical Institution. He had a brilliant career in the Medical School at Queen's University, Belfast. He took first place at the examination for the Indian Medical Service at the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool. He went to India in 1912, and was attached to the 31st Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers at Kohat. At the outbreak of war he transferred to the Dogras, in order to take part in the operations of the Indian Expeditionary Force in the Persian Gulf.

Private Henry Kenny of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment is another London Irishman, and the third of the name of Kenny who have gained the coveted V.C. The stories of the other two Kennys are told in the first series of *The Irish at the Front*. Private Kenny's father is a native of Limerick, where all his people belonged to, and from where he moved to England with his parents. Private Kenny himself was born in Hackney, London, and enlisted, at the age of eighteen, in 1906. On the outbreak of war he was recalled to the Colours as a reservist, and took part in many famous engagements. The official record of his gallantry is as follows—

"For most conspicuous bravery. Private Kenny went out on six different occasions on one day under a very heavy shell, rifle and machine-gun fire, and each time succeeded in carrying to a place of safety a wounded man who had been lying in the open. He was himself wounded in the neck whilst handing the last man over the parapet."

When Kenny was invalidated home on account of the wounds he received in performing the noble action for which he won the Victoria Cross, he made no reference to his achievement. The sixth man whom he

rescued was his own Colonel, and it was while he was bearing his commanding officer into safety that he was himself wounded. On his return home for a holiday after the announcement of the award he visited the House of Commons, and was introduced to Sir E. Carson, Lord and Lady Pirrie, Mr. and Mrs. Redmond, Lord Wimborne and Colonel Churchill, and had tea on the terrace.

There was much rejoicing amongst the pupils and staff of the Royal Hibernian Military School, Phoenix Park, Dublin, when it became known that the greatest honour that can be bestowed upon a soldier—the Victoria Cross—had been won by a former pupil of the school in the person of Private Frederick Jeremiah Edwards, of the Middlesex Regiment. There are three Royal Military Schools in the United Kingdom (the Duke of York's School, near London, the Queen Victoria School in Scotland, and the Royal Hibernian School), and naturally there was keen anxiety amongst them as to which would be the first to place a V.C. to its credit in the present war. The Irish school has won, thanks to Private "Jerry" Edwards. He is the second "old boy" of the Hibernian School to win the V.C., the previous occasion on which the distinction was gained being during the Crimean War. Private Edwards was born at Queenstown, co. Cork, the son of a soldier. He entered the Hibernian School at seven years of age. He is spoken of as a bright, intelligent and plucky lad by the schoolmasters, to whom his lively spirits were oftentimes a source of worry—and, perhaps, of trouble for "Jerry." When he was fourteen he left the school to join the Army. The circumstances under which he won the V.C. in his twenty-first year are thus officially described—

"For most conspicuous bravery and resource. His part of the line was held up by machine-gun fire, and all officers

had become casualties. There was confusion and indication of retirement. Private Edwards, grasping the situation, on his own initiative dashed out towards the gun, which he knocked out with his bombs. This very gallant act, coupled with great presence of mind and a total disregard of personal danger, made further advance possible and cleared up a dangerous situation."

A former schoolmate of Private Edwards, and a comrade in the Middlesex Regiment, gives the following more specific particulars of the hero's courage and determination in carrying along the wavering men by the force of his example—

"The day our regiment went over there was some wild work. The enemy concentrated on our part of the line a furious fire. There was absolutely no cover for a great part of the way. One by one our officers were picked off. Young Lieutenant — was the last to go. As he fell he called to the men to go right on. They did so for a time, but things got worse, and finally the men seemed to lose heart. 'Jerry' Edwards declared that he wasn't going back. He sprang forward into the thick hail of machine-gun bullets, in full view of the taunting Huns on their parapet. 'This way, Die-hards,' he cried, and at the sound of the glorious old nickname the men recovered from their panic. Gradually order was restored, and the men followed Edwards up to the enemy parapet. This was stormed in a few minutes. Edwards himself bowled over a machine-gun and its crew. He picked up a couple of bombs and threw them. Privates behind him handed up more, and from an exposed position on the enemy parapet he kept raining bombs on the foe. The gun and crew were blown to bits, and the rest of the enemy bolted to their next position. Edwards saw what they were up to, and, leading some of the men by the near cut, he intercepted the flying enemy. Then a great bombing match began. Our lads won, thanks to the way the team was handled by Edwards. Though the position was dangerous for some time afterwards, we held on, and finally consolidated the ground."

The finest quality in gallantry is that which impels a soldier to leave a place of safety voluntarily, and, though he is not under the excitement of battle, to plunge with cool calculation into some danger which he knows and has estimated to its full extent. For a

deed of valour of that character the Victoria Cross was given to Private William Young, East Lancashire Regiment. The official record says—

"On seeing that his sergeant had been wounded he left his trench to attend to him under very heavy fire. The wounded non-commissioned officer requested Private Young to get under cover, but he refused, and was almost immediately very seriously wounded by having both jaws shattered. Notwithstanding his terrible injuries, Private Young continued endeavouring to effect the rescue upon which he had set his mind, and eventually succeeded with the aid of another soldier. He then went unaided to the dressing-station, where it was discovered that he had also been wounded by a rifle bullet in the chest. The great fortitude, determination, courage, and devotion to duty displayed by this soldier could hardly be surpassed."

Private Young was born in Glasgow of Irish parents, and joined the East Lancashire Regiment in May 1899, when about twenty-one years of age. He was transferred to the Army Reserve in August 1902, and joined Section D, Army Reserve, in May 1911. He responded to the mobilisation call on August 5, 1914, and went to France on September 14, going all through the fighting until wounded at the battle of Ypres in November 1914, by a bullet in the thigh. Returning to the Front, he was "gassed," and the resulting injuries to his eyes laid him up for three weeks in hospital. On going back to the trenches the second time he performed his heroic deed on December 22, 1915.

Young's home was at Preston, where he had a wife and nine children, the youngest of whom was born while the father was at the war. In the following letter to his wife Private Young told how the news of his distinction was received by him in a military hospital in England, where he underwent an operation for the complete removal of his lower jaw and the fitting of an artificial one in its place.

" Of course, long enough before you get this letter you will see by the papers that I have received the greatest honour that any Britisher can get, namely, the V.C., and, of course, I am naturally very proud of the great honour, both for my sake and the sake of you and the kiddies and the good old regiment I have the honour to belong to, and the old proud town of Preston. I was shaving when the news came through, and the matron and sisters, nurses and patients have the hands wrung off me, and I can see I could do with another pair of hands. There are telegrams coming every two or three minutes, so I have a busy time in front of me. I have another soldier from Lancashire helping me to answer them."

Young's indomitable spirit was finely evidenced in a second letter to his wife—

" I feel all right, seeing what I have gone through; in fact it was the grace of God, careful nursing, and a grand constitution that pulled me through. . . . You know the old saying, 'Fools rush in where Angels dare not tread,' and if I was in the same place to-morrow I would do exactly the same thing. I knew that if I went over the wife and the kiddies would be well looked after. I am very glad to say that the sergeant I carried out is all right, and I expect in about a fortnight's time he will be at home on sick leave with his young wife, as he only got married just after the war broke out, so you see it's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

Young was able in April 1916 to visit Preston, where he was given a public welcome. But he had to return to hospital again, and died in August 1916. A local fund was raised, and so generously responded to that it was possible to invest a sum of over £500 for the family.

Captain Henry Kelly of the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment got the V.C. for deeds which are thus officially described—

" For most conspicuous bravery in attack. He twice rallied his company under the heaviest fire, and finally led the only three available men into the enemy trench, and there remained bombing until two of them had become casualties and enemy reinforcements had arrived. He then carried his company

sergeant-major, who had been wounded, back to our trenches, a distance of seventy yards, and subsequently three other soldiers. He set a fine example of gallantry and endurance."

Captain Kelly was born in Manchester of Irish parentage. His father was from Wicklow and his mother from Limerick. He is twenty-eight years of age, and joined the Manchester "Pals" with his younger brother on September 4, 1914. He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant-Major two months later, and in the following May was gazetted Second Lieutenant to the West Riding Regiment. Prior to joining the Army he was employed at the General Post Office in Manchester as a sorting clerk and telegraphist. He was a prominent member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and also of the city branch of the United Irish League. He could speak the Irish language before he ever spent a holiday in Ireland. A detailed account of the circumstances in which Captain Kelly won the V.C. is given by a soldier in his company—

"The enemy had pounded us unmercifully with their big guns, and the strain put on our men was so great that they began to waver. Captain Kelly sprang forward and urged his men to the attack under a blistering hot fire. They responded with cheers, and under his direction they held a very exposed position for hours. Later, things looked black once more. So he up again and called on his lads to hold fast for all they were worth. To show his contempt for the danger to which we were exposed he led the way towards another position. He decided to have a cut in at the enemy's trench. He got hold of a non-com. and two privates belonging to the bombing section. With these he entered the enemy trench and started to bomb the Boches out. They got a good way along, driving before them an enemy more than big enough to eat up the whole company. Then Fritz was reinforced, and under the direction of a very brave officer the enemy began to push our party back. The two privates were knocked out, and Captain Kelly had to make for home. He picked up the sergeant-major and carried him out of the German trench. The enemy had many a pot shot at him, and the shell fire

continued as well. It is a miracle how he escaped. The Boches were close on his heels. The captain just laid down his burden for a few minutes and threw a bomb or two at them. They skulked back. Then he picked up his burden and came marching back to us. All the way he was under heavy fire. After taking a look round to see how things were shaping he found that three of our chaps were out in the open, wounded. Immediately he set off to find them. One by one he carried them into safety, in spite of the furious fire kept up by the enemy."

Australia is proud of Private Martin O'Meara, V.C., of the Australian Infantry. So also is Tipperary. He comes of an old Tipperary family, and has well sustained the splendid traditions of the fighting race. The official record of the award of the V.C. is as follows—

"For most conspicuous bravery. During four days of very heavy fighting he repeatedly went out and brought in wounded officers and men from 'No Man's Land' under intense artillery and machine-gun fire. He also volunteered and carried up ammunition and bombs through a heavy barrage to a portion of the trenches which was being heavily shelled at the time. He showed throughout an utter contempt of danger and undoubtedly saved many lives."

Private O'Meara, V.C., is thirty-two years of age. He is the youngest son of Mr. Thomas O'Meara, Rathcabbin, Birr, and is one of a family of nine children. Before he left Ireland, in 1911, Private O'Meara worked as a tree-feller, and in Australia he continued to labour in the woods, being engaged in making railway sleepers at Collie in West Australia. In the August of 1915 he answered the call to arms, and entered the Blackboy Training Camp as a member of the 12th reinforcements of the Australian Infantry. Before embarking from Australia a friend vouches that O'Meara said: "As I am going I will do the best I can to bring back the Victoria Cross." To achieve the highest award in the British Army was

evidently strongly before his mind. He was two months in France before going up to the trenches, where he remained five days in all, covering himself with glory and winning the V.C. in this short period.

Private O'Meara got a fortnight's leave in October 1916—two months after he had won the V.C.—and availed himself of it to visit his native place. The modesty of the man is to be seen in the mode of his home-coming. His family expected him, but did not know the exact date of his arrival. He got off the train at Birr Station and walked home—about five miles—in the darkness, along the disused Birr and Portumna railway line, which passes close to his home. No one recognised him at the station or along the way. He opened the door and walked in, surprising his brother and sister inside. At the end of his leave he returned almost as quietly as he had come. A fund to make him a presentation was raised locally, and a considerable sum was invested in War stock, and a gold watch was bought. Advantage was taken of the presence of General Hickie, commanding an Irish Division, on a short visit from France to his home at Selvoir, North Tipperary, to have him present the gold watch to O'Meara. But O'Meara, like the genuine fighting man that he is, had immediately volunteered for active service on his return to London from home, after recovering from his wounds, and it was found exceedingly difficult to get into touch with him. In fact, but for the interest taken by General Hickie it would have been impossible. Ultimately his exact whereabouts were learned through the War Office, and arrangements were made for his return. Even so, O'Meara could not get home in time for the presentation, and it was made to his brothers and sisters. Physically, he is a fine type of manhood, and in disposition is most lovable.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RELATIONS BETWEEN ENEMY TRENCHES

#### IRISH KINDLINESS AND GERMAN GUILE

IN the trenches one evening a battalion of the Leinster Regiment held a "kailee" (*ceilidh*), or Irish sing-song, at which there was a spirited rendering of the humorous old ballad, "Bryan O'Lynn," sung to an infectiously rollicking tune. The opening verse runs--

" Bryan O'Lynn had no breeches to wear,  
So he bought a sheep-skin to make him a pair,  
With the woolly side out, and the skinny side in,  
Faix, 'tis pleasant and cool, says Brian O'Lynn."

The swing of the tune took the fancy of the Germans in their trenches, less than fifty yards away. With a "rumpty-tum-tumty-tum-tumty-tum-tum," they loudly hummed the air of the end of each verse, all unknowing that the Leinsters, singing at the top of their voices, gave the words a topical application—

" With the woolly side out and the skinny side in,  
Sure, We'll wallop the Gerrys, said Brian O'Lynn."

Hearty bursts of laughter and cheers arose from both trenches at the conclusion of the song. It seemed as if the combatants gladly availed themselves of the chance opportunity of becoming united again in the common brotherhood of man, even for but a fleeting moment, by the spirit of good-humour and hilarity.

Lieutenant Denis Oliver Barnett, a young English officer of a different battalion of the same Leinster Regiment (whose letters from the Front have been published as a memorial by his parents), tells of a more curious incident still, which likewise led to a brief cessation of hostilities. Two privates in his company had a quarrel in the trenches, and nothing would do them but to fight it out on No Man's Land. The Germans were most appreciative and accommodating. Not only did they not molest the pugilists, but they cheered them, and actually fired the contents of their rifles in the air by way of a salute. The European War was, in fact, suspended in this particular section of the lines while two Irishmen settled their own little differences by a contest of fists.

"Who will now say that the Germans are not sportsmen?" was the comment of the young English officer. There is, however, another and perhaps a shrewder view of the episode. It was taken, I have been told, by a sergeant of the company. "Yerra, come down out of that, ye pair of born fools," he called out to the fighters. "If ye had only a glimmer of sense ye'd see, so ye would, that 'tis playing the Gerrys' game ye are. Sure, there's nothing they'd like better than to see us all knocking blazes out of each other." But as regards the moral pointed by the officer, there must be, of course, many "sportsmen" among the millions of German soldiers; though the opinion widely prevailing in the British Army is that they are more often treacherous fighters. Indeed, to their dirty practices is mainly to be ascribed the bitter personal animosity that occasionally mark the relations between the combatants, when the fighting becomes most bloody and desperate, and—as happens at times in all wars—no quarter is given to those who allow none.

In the wars of old between England and France, both sides were animated by a very fine sense of

chivalry. Barère, one of the chief popular orators during the worst excesses of the French Revolution, induced the Convention to declare that no quarter was to be given to the English. "Soldiers of Liberty," he cried, "when victory places Englishmen at your mercy, strike!" But the French troops absolutely refused to act upon the savage decree. The principle upon which both French and English acted during the Peninsular War was that of doing as little harm to one another as possible consistently with the winning of victory. Between the rank and file friendly feelings may be said, without any incongruity, to have existed. They were able, of their own accord, to come to certain understandings that tended to mitigate, to some extent, the hardships and even the dangers to which they were both alike exposed. One was that sentries at the outposts must not be fired on or surprised. Often no more than a space of twenty yards separated them, and when the order to advance was given to either Army the sentries of the other were warned to retire. Once a French sentry helped a British sentry to replace his knapsack so that he might more quickly fall back before the firing began. A remarkable instance of signalling between the opposing forces is mentioned by General Sir Charles Napier in his *History of the Peninsular War*. Wellington sent a detachment of riflemen to drive away some French troops occupying the top of a hill near Bayonne, and as they approached the enemy he ordered them to fire. "But," says Napier, "with a loud voice one of those soldiers replied, 'No firing,' and holding up the butt of his rifle tapped it in a peculiar way." This was a signal to the French and was understood by them—probably as a result of a mutual arrangement—to mean, "We must have the hill for a short time." "The French, who, though they could not maintain, would not relinquish the post without a fight if they

had been fired upon, quietly retired," Napier writes; "and this signal would never have been made if the post had been one capable of a permanent defence, so well do veterans understand war and its proprieties."

Throughout that long campaign the British and French recognised each other as worthy foemen, and they were both solicitous to maintain unstained the honour and dignity of arms. As the opposing forces lay resting before Lisbon for months, the advanced posts got so closely into touch that much friendly intercourse took place between them. French officers frequently asked for such little luxuries as cigars, coffee and stationery to be brought to them from Lisbon, which was held by the British, and their requests were always readily complied with. At the battle of Talavera, on July 28, 1809, the possession of a hill was fiercely contested all day. The weather was so intensely hot that the combatants were parched with thirst. At noon there was an almost entire cessation of artillery and rifle fire, as if an informal truce had been suddenly come to, by a flash of intuition, and with one accord French and British rushed down to the rivulet at the foot of the hill to moisten their burning throats. "The men crowded on each side of the water's edge," says Napier. "They threw aside their caps and muskets, and chatted to each other in broken French and still more fragmentary English across the stream. Flasks were exchanged; hands shaken. Then the bugle and the rolling drum called the men back to their colours, and the fight awoke once more."

Such amenities between combatants are very ancient—the Greeks and Trojans used to exchange presents and courtesies, in the intervals of fighting—and the early stages of this war seemed to afford a promise that they would be revived. The fraternising of the British and Germans at their first Christmas under

arms, in 1914, will, perhaps, always be accounted as the most curious episode of the war. It was quite unauthorised by the higher command. The men themselves, under the influence of the great Christian festival, brought about a suspension of hostilities at several points of the lines, and they availed themselves of the opportunity to satisfy their natural curiosity to see something more of each other than they could see through the smoke of battle with deadly weapons in their hands and hatred in their eyes. Each side had taken prisoners; but prisoners are "out of it," and therefore reduced to the level of non-combatants. The foeman in being appears in a very different light. He has the power to strike. You may have to kill him or you may be killed by him. So the British and the Germans, impelled in the main by a common feeling of inquisitiveness, met together, unarmed, in No Man's Land. There was some amicable conversation where they could make themselves understood to each other, which happened when a German was found who could speak a little English. Cigarettes and tunic-buttons were freely exchanged. But, for the most part, British and Germans stood, with arms folded across their breasts, and stared at each other with a kind of dread fascination.

It never happened again. How could it possibly be repeated? The introduction of the barbaric elements of "frightfulness," hitherto confined to savage tribes at war, the use of such devilish inventions as poison gas and liquid fire, are due to the malignant minds of the German high command, and for them the German soldiers cannot be held accountable. But the native lowness of morality shown by so many of the German rank and file, their apparent insensitivity to ordinary humane instincts, the well-authenticated stories of their filthy and cruel conduct in the occupied districts, inevitably tended to harden and

embitter their adversaries against them too. Of the instances of their treachery to Irish soldiers which have been brought to my notice, I will mention only two. One arose out of the "truce" of Christmas Day, 1914, despite the goodwill of the occasion. The victim, Sergeant Timothy O'Toole, Leinster Regiment, first mentions that he took part in a game of football with the Germans, and then proceeds—

"I was returning to my own trench unaccompanied about 12.15 p.m. When I reached within fifteen paces I was sniped by a Hunnish swine, the bullet entering my back, penetrating my intestines. Following the example of Our Lord, I instantly forgave him, concluding he was only a black sheep, characteristic of any army or community, but I was labouring under a delusion. Within five minutes of being hit, I had quite a number around me, including officers and clergymen. I was so mortally wounded that the 'Padre' administered the last rite of the Church on the spot. Four stretcher bearers came out for me. I noticed the white band and Red Cross on their arms. Immediately I was lifted up on the stretcher. Though I was semi-unconscious I remember the bullets beating the ground like hailstone on a March day. I was wounded again, this time the bullet going through the lower part of my back. Here two of my bearers got hit, Privates Melia and Peters. The former died in hospital immediately after. Naturally the two bearers instantly dropped the stretcher. I fell violently to the ground—nice medicine for a man wounded in the abdomen."

"Thank Providence, I am still living," Sergeant O'Toole adds, "but a living victim of German atrocity and barbarism." In the other case a very gallant young officer of the Dublin Fusiliers, Lieutenant Louis G. Doran, lost his life on the Somme, October 23, 1916, through the guile and falsehood of German soldiers. The circumstances are told in a letter written by Captain Louis C. Byrne to the father of Lieutenant Doran, Mr. Charles J. Doran of Blackrock, co. Dublin—

"Believe me, Mr. Doran, I sympathise fully with you in

your loss because I was your son's company commander and by his death I have lost one of the best officers in my company. We attacked a certain position and we had just got to it when some Germans put up their hands to surrender. Your son went out to take their surrender and they shot him through the heart and he died at once. My other three officers were also knocked out, and only myself and thirty-six men returned to headquarters after the battle. Still, we took the position owing to gallantry of men like your son. He died a noble and heroic death—no man could possibly wish for a better one. He told me he had just had a brother wounded, so your loss is double and words cannot express my sympathy with you. Your son was buried with the men in the position we took. It was impossible to bring his body down owing to heavy fire. I think it is what he would have liked best."

The lady to whom Lieutenant Doran was engaged to be married kindly sent me a few extracts from his letters which convey something of his care and thought for his men. "Those I have seen from the men," she says, "amplify this from their own experience in ways which he would never dream of mentioning, he was always so modest about all he did." "I'm going to tell you what I would really love to get now and again," Lieutenant Doran wrote in one letter. "You see, we officers are never very hard up for grub, and I would much prefer to receive something for my men, who get very little in the way of luxuries or dainties. As you know, a platoon is split into four sections, and anything that I could divide into four parts amongst them would be most acceptable. For instance, four small tins of butter would be a great luxury, or a big cake—anything that gives them a change." In another he said: "As you say, there are always hungry soldiers to be found, and I often wish some of the presents I receive would only come together, as one cake is a useless thing among forty hungry men. The poor fellows have fairly rough fare as a rule, and sometimes not even much of that. One wonders how it is they keep so cheerful." The

men, in turn, were most devoted to Lieutenant Doran. They would do anything to prevent a hair of his head being hurt.

Generally speaking, feeling in the British Army is, however, extraordinarily devoid of that vindictiveness which springs from a deep sense of personal injury, and evokes, in turn, a desire for revenge which, were it shown, would, however lamentable, be not unnatural in many circumstances of this war. The Germans, in the mass, are regarded as having been dehumanised and transformed into a process of ruthless destruction. In any case, they are the enemy. As such, there is a satisfaction—nay, a positive delight—in sweeping them out of existence. That is war. But the rage for killing them is impersonal. Against the German soldier individually it may be said that, on the whole, there is no rancour. In fact, the British soldiers have a curiously detached and generous way of regarding their country's enemies. When the German soldier is taken prisoner, or picked up wounded, the British soldier is disposed, as a hundred thousand instances show, to treat him as a "pal"—to divide his food and share his cigarettes with him as he passes to the base.

It is very noticeable how all the war correspondents, in their accounts of the taking of the village of Guinchy on the Somme by the Irish Division, dwelt on the chivalrous way in which the Irish treated their vanquished foes. Once the spirit of combative-ness is aroused in the Irish soldiers they hate the enemy like the black death to which they strive to consign them. But when the fury of battle has died down in victory there are none so soft and kindly to the beaten enemy. Surrender should always, of course, disarm hostility. No true soldier would decline to lower his bayonet when a foeman acknowledges defeat and places his life in his keeping. That is, after a fair and gallant fight on the part of the

foeman. It was because the Germans at Guinchy were vindictive in combat, and despicable when overthrown, that the Irish acted with rare magnanimity in accepting their submission and sparing their lives.

In that engagement the Irish made a characteristically headlong dash for the enemy positions. Rifle and machine-gun fire was poured into them by the Germans up to the very last moment—until, in fact, they had reached the trenches; and then, as they were about to jump in and bayonet and club their blood-thirsty foemen, they found them on their knees, with hands uplifted. The Irish were enraged at the sight. To think that men who had been so merciless should beg for mercy when their opponents were on top of them! Were their comrades slain only a moment since to go unavenged? These thoughts passed rapidly through the minds of the Irish. As swiftly came the decision, worthy of high-souled men. An enemy on his knees is to them inviolable, not to be hurt or injured, however mean and low he may have proved himself to be. So the Irish bayonet, at the very breasts of the Germans, was turned aside; that was the right and proper thing to do, and it would not call for notice but that it shines with the light of chivalry in comparison with the black meanness and treachery of the Germans.

In the gladiatorial fights for the entertainment of the people in ancient Rome the defeated combatant was expected to expose his throat to the sword of the victor, and any shrinking on his part caused the arena to ring with the angry shouts of the thousands of spectators: "Receive the steel." The way of the Irish at Guinchy was different, and perhaps the renunciation of their revenge was not the least magnificent act of a glorious day.

"If we brained them on the spot, who could blame us? 'Tis ourselves that would think it no sin if it

was done by any one else," said a private of the Dublin Fusiliers. "Let me tell you," he went on, "what happened to myself. As I raced across the open with my comrades, jumping in and out of shell holes, and the bullets flying thick around us, laying many the fine boy low, I said to myself, this is going to be a fight to the last gasp for those of us that get to the Germans. As I came near to the trenches I picked a man out for myself. Straight in front of me he was, leaning out of the trench, and he with a rifle firing away at us as if we were rabbits. I made for him with my bayonet ready, determined to give him what he deserved, when—what do you think?—didn't he notice me and what I was up to. Dropping his rifle, he raised himself up in the trench and stretched out his hands towards me. What could you do in that case, but what I did? Sure you wouldn't have the heart to strike him down, even if he were to kill you. I caught sight of his eyes, and there was such a frightened and pleading look in them that I at once lowered my rifle. I could no more prod him with my bayonet than I could a toddling child. I declare to the Lord the state of the poor devil almost made me cry. I took him by the hand, saying, 'You're my prisoner.' I don't suppose he understood a word of what I said, but he clung to me, crying, 'Kamerad! kamerad!' I was more glad than ever then that I hadn't the blood of him on my soul. 'Tis a queer thing to say, maybe, of a man who acted like that; but, all the same, he looked a decent boy every bit of him. I suppose the truth of it is this: we soldiers, on both sides, have to go through such terrible experiences that there is no accounting for how we may behave. We might be devils, all out, in the morning, and saints, no less, in the evening."

The relations between the trenches include even attempts at an exchange of repartee. The wit, as may

be supposed, in such circumstances, is invariably ironic and sarcastic. My examples are Irish, for the reason that I have had most to do with Irish soldiers, but they may be taken as fairly representative of the taunts and pleasantries which are often bandied across No Man's Land. The Germans holding part of their line in Belgium got to know that the British trenches opposite them were being held by an Irish battalion. "Hello, Irish," they cried; "how is King Carson getting on? and have you got Home Rule yet?" The company sergeant-major, a big Tipperary man, was selected to make the proper reply, and in order that it might be fully effective he sent it through a megaphone which the colonel was accustomed to use in addressing the battalion on parade. "Hello, Gerrys," he called out. "I'm thinking it isn't information ye want, but divarshion; but 'tis information I'll be after giving ye, all the same. Later on we'll be sending ye some fun that'll make ye laugh at the other side of ye'r mouths. The last we heard of Carson he was prodding the Government like the very devil to put venim into their blows at ye, and more power to his elbow while he's at that work, say we. As for Home Rule, we mean to have it, and we'll get it, please God, when ye're licked. Put that in ye're pipes and smoke it."

Of all the horrible features of the war, surely the most heartrending is the fate of the wounded lying without succour in the open between the opposing lines, owing to the inability of the higher command on both sides to agree to an arrangement for a short suspension of hostilities after an engagement so that the stricken might be brought in. Prone in the mud and slush they lie, during the cruel winter weather, with the rain pouring down upon them, their moans of agony in the darkness of the night mingling with the cold blasts that howl around them. But, thanks

to the loving kindness of man for his fellow, even in war, these unfortunate creatures are not deserted. British soldiers without number have voluntarily crept out into No Man's Land to rescue them, often under murderous fire from the enemy. Many of the Victoria Crosses won in this war have been awarded for conspicuous gallantry displayed in these most humane and chivalrous enterprises.

One of the most uplifting stories I have heard was told me by a captain of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Out there in front of the trench held by his company lay a figure in khaki writhing in pain and wailing for help. "Will no one come to me?" he cried in a voice broken with anguish. He had been disabled in the course of a raid on the German trenches the night before by a battalion which was relieved in the morning. These appeals of his were like stabs to the compassionate hearts of the Irish Fusiliers. Several of them told the captain they could stand it no longer, and must go out to the wounded man. If they were shot in the attempt, what matter? It happened that a little dog was then making himself quite at home in both the British and German trenches at this part of the lines. He was a neutral; he took no sides; he regularly crossed from one to the other, and found in both friends to give him food and a kind word, with a pat on the head. The happy thought came to the captain to make a messenger of the dog. So he wrote, "May we take our wounded man in?", tied the note to the dog's tail, and sent him to the German trenches. The message was in English, for the captain did not know German, and had to trust to the chance of the enemy being able to read it. In a short time the dog returned with the answer. It was in English, and it ran: "Yes; you can have five minutes." So the captain and a man went out with a stretcher and brought the poor fellow back to our lines.

Some of these understandings are come to by a sort of telepathic suggestion inspired by the principle of "live and let live," however incongruous that may seem in warfare. As an instance, recuperative work, such as the bringing up of food to the firing lines is often allowed to go on in comparative quietude. Neither side cares to stand on guard in the trenches with an empty stomach. Often, therefore, firing is almost entirely suspended in the early hours of the night, when it is known that rations are being distributed. That is not the way everywhere and always. A private of the Royal Irish Regiment told me that what he found most aggravating in the trenches was the fusillading by the Germans when the men were getting ready a bit to eat. "I suppose," he remarked, "'twas the smell of the frying bacon that put their dandher up." But even defensive work has been allowed to proceed without interference, when carried on simultaneously by both sides. Heavy rain, following a hard frost, turned the trenches in the Ypres district into a chaos of ooze and slime. "How deep is it with you?" a German soldier shouted across to the British. "Up to our knees, bedad," was the reply. "You are lucky fellows. We're up to our belts in it," said the German. Driven to desperation by their hideous discomfort, the Germans soon after crawled up on to their parapets and sat there to dry and stretch their legs, calling out, "Kamerads, don't shoot; don't shoot, kamerads!" The reply of the Irish was to get out of their trenches and do likewise. On another occasion, in the broad daylight, unarmed parties of men on both sides, by a tacit agreement, set about repairing their respective barbed-wire entanglements. They were no more than fifteen or twenty yards apart. The wiring-party on the British side belonged to the Munster Fusiliers. Being short of mallets, one of the Munsters coolly walked across to the enemy and said,

"Good-morrow, Gerrys. Would any of ye be so kind as to lend me the loan of a hammer?" The Germans received him with smiles, but as they did not know English they were unable to understand what he wanted until he made it clear by pantomimic action, when he was given the hammer "with a heart and a half," as he put it himself. Having repaired the defences of his own trench, he brought back the hammer to the Germans, and thought he might give them "a bit of his mind," without offence, as they did not know what he was saying. "Here's your hammer, and thanks," said he. "High hanging to the man that caused this war—ye know who I mean—and may we be all soon busily at work hammering nails into his coffin."

Many touching stories might be told of the sympathy which unites the combatants when they find themselves lying side by side, wounded and helpless, in shell holes and copses, or on the open plain after an engagement. The ruling spirit which animates the soldier in the fury of the fight is, as it seems to me, that of self-preservation. He kills or disables so that he may not be killed or disabled himself. Besides that, each side are convinced they are waging a purely defensive war. So it is that hostility subsides, once the sense of danger is removed, and each side sees in its captives not devils or barbarians, but fellow-men. Especially among the wounded, British and German, do these sentiments prevail, as they lie together on the field of battle. In a dim way they pitifully regard each other as hapless victims caught in the vortex of the greatest of human tragedies, or set against each other by the ambitions of rulers and statesmen in which they have no part. They try to help each other, to ease each other's sufferings, to stanch each other's wounds, to give each other comfort in their sore distress.

"Poor devil, unnerved by shell shock," was the comment passed as a wounded German was being carried by on a stretcher sobbing as if his heart would break. It was not the roar of the artillery and the bursting of high explosives that had unnerved him, but the self-sacrifice of a Dublin Fusilier, who, in succouring him, lost his own life. At the hospital the German related that, on recovering his senses after being shot, he found the Dublin Fusilier trying to stanch the wound in his shattered leg, from which blood was flowing profusely. The Irishman undid the field-dressing, consisting of bandage and anti-septic preparation, which he had wrapped round his own wound, and applied it to the German, as he appeared to be in danger of bleeding to death. Before the two men were discovered by a British stretcher party, the Dublin Fusilier had passed away. He developed blood-poisoning through his exposed wound. The German, on hearing the news, broke down and wept bitterly.

Reconciliation between wounded foemen is happily a common occurrence on the stricken plain. The malignant roar of the guns may still be in their ears, and they may see around them bodies battered and twisted out of all human shape. All the more are they anxious to testify that there is no fury in their hearts with each other, and that their one wish is to make the supreme parting with words of reconciliation and prayers on their lips. I have had from a French officer, who was wounded in a cavalry charge early in the war, an account of a pathetic incident which took place close to where he lay. Among his companions in affliction were two who were far gone on the way to death. One was a private in the Uhlans, and the other a private in the Royal Irish Dragoons. The Irishman got, with a painful effort, from an inside pocket of his tunic a rosary beads which had a crucifix

attached to it. Then he commenced to mutter to himself the invocations to the Blessed Virgin of which the Rosary is composed. "Hail, Mary! full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." The German, lying huddled close by, stirred with the uneasy movements of a man weak from pain and loss of blood on hearing the murmur of prayer, and, looking round in a dazed condition, the sight of the beads in the hands of his fellow in distress seemed to recall to his mind other times and different circumstances—family prayers at home somewhere in Bavaria, and Sunday evening devotions in church, for he made, in his own tongue, the response to the invocation : "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now at the hour of our death. Amen." So the voices intermingled in address and prayer—the rapt ejaculations of the Irishman, the deep guttural of the German—getting weaker and weaker, in the process of dissolution, until they were hushed on earth for evermore.

War has outwardly lost its romance, with its colour and pageantry. It is bloody, ugly and horrible. Yet romance is not dead. It still survives, radiant and glowing, in the heroic achievements of our soldiers, and in the tender impulses of their hearts.

THE END

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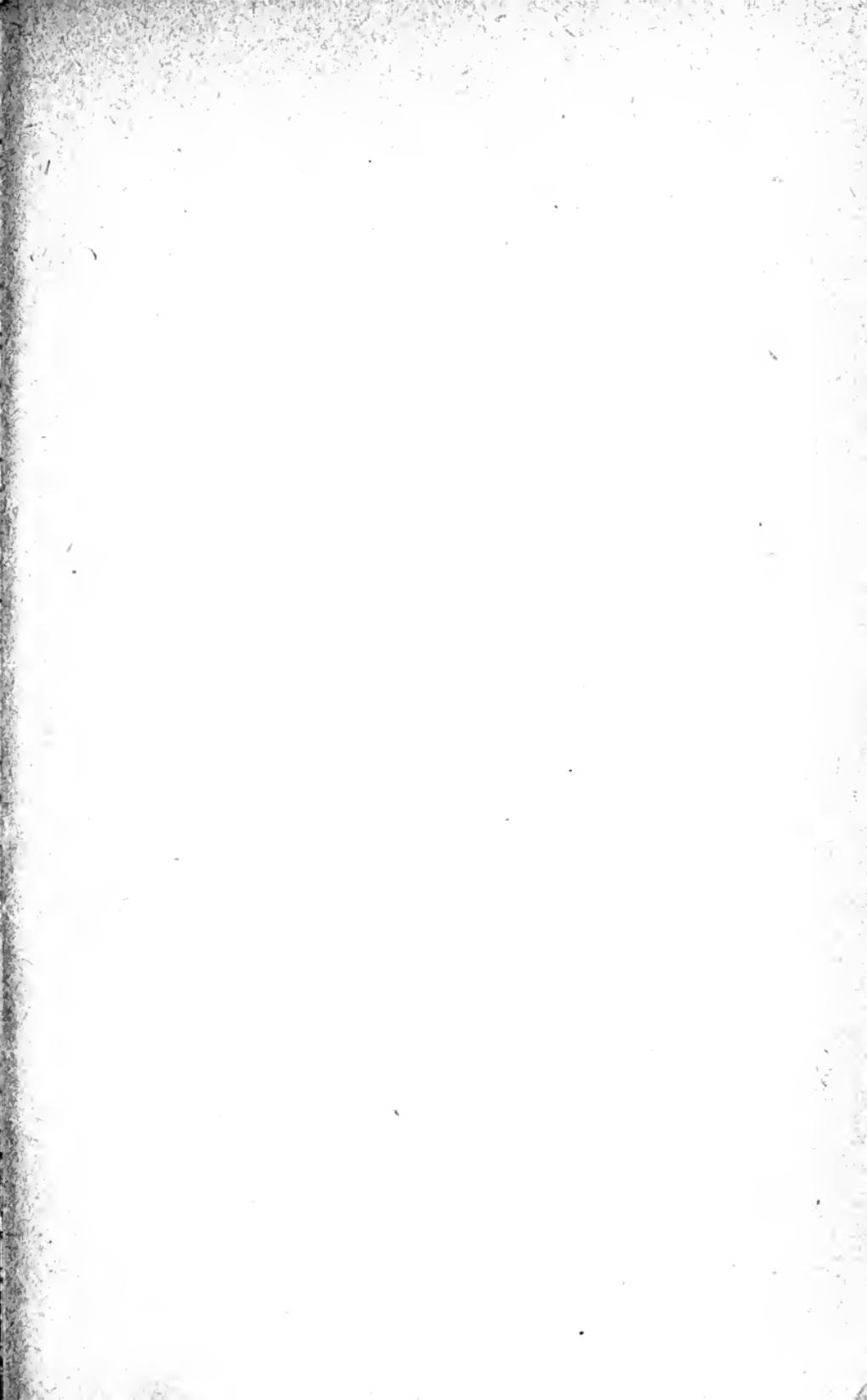
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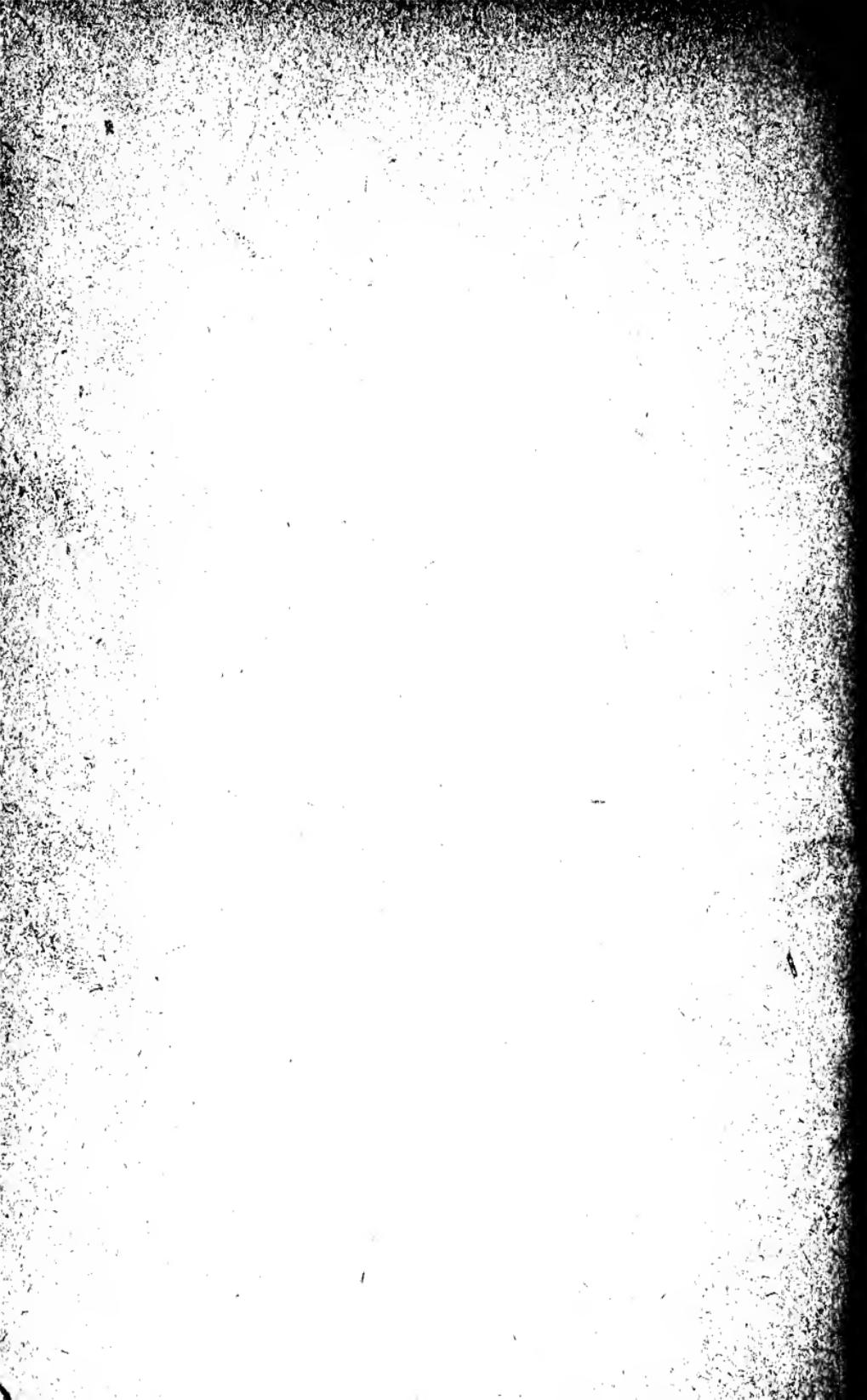
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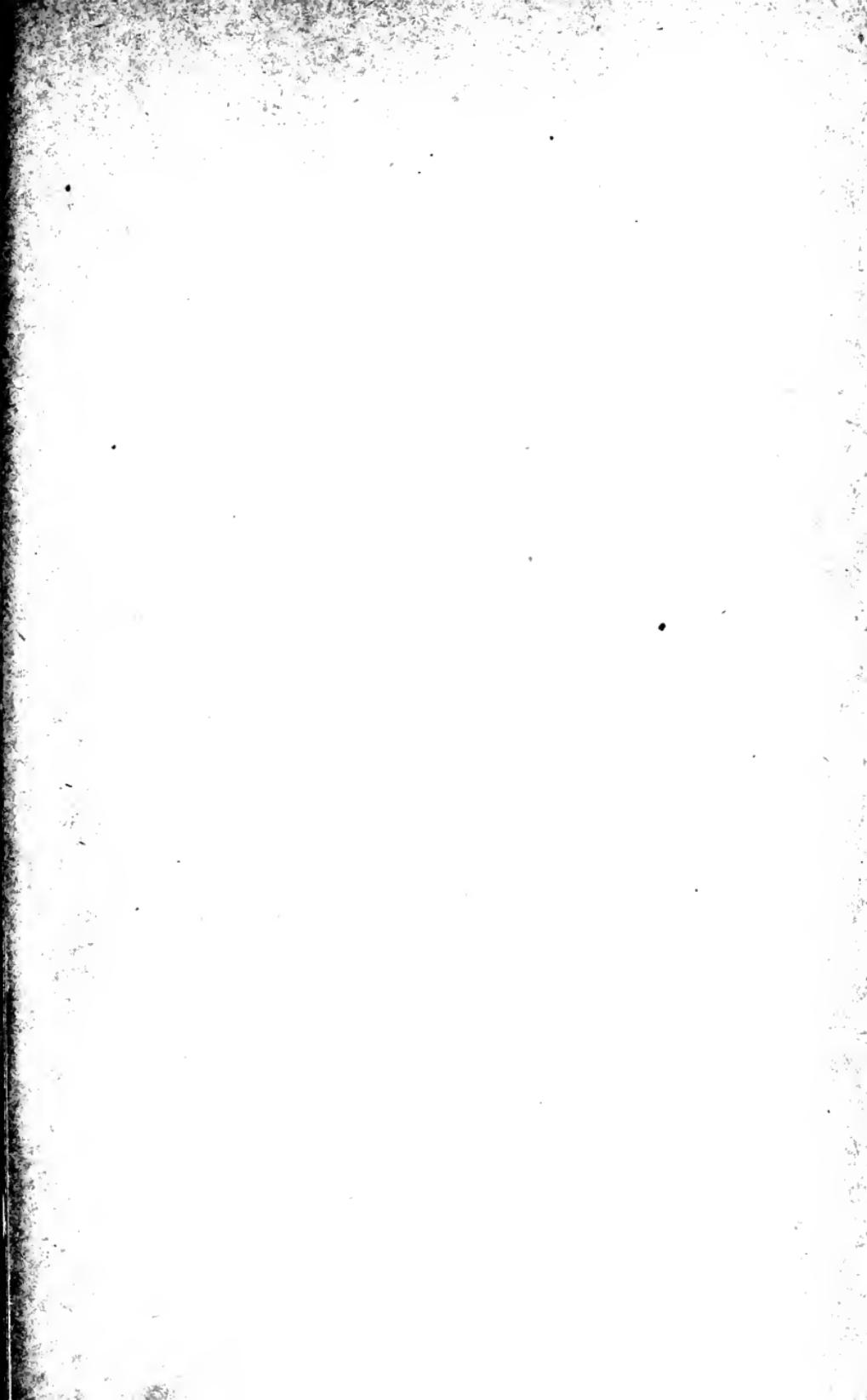
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